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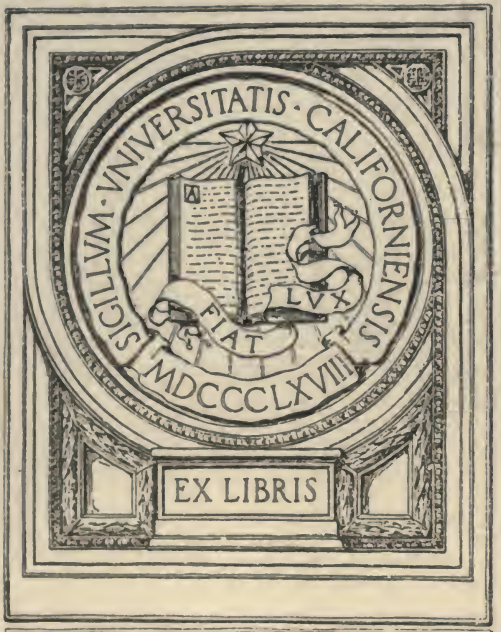

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THE WISE WOMEN OF INVERNESS

AND OTHER MISCELLANIES

THE WISE WOMEN OF INVERNESS

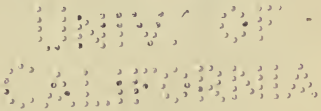
A TALE

AND OTHER MISCELLANIES

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

NEW AND REVISED EDITION



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THE

WISE WOMEN OF INVERNESS.

THE WISE WOMEN OF INVERNESS.

CHAPTER I.

AT FASSLIE FARM.

Deep and heavy the long-swelling surge of the North Sea thundered along the Cromarty shores; and high and shrill above that reverberating plunge sang and whistled and shrieked a strenuous wind, sweeping inland from the wide waste of waters; but nevertheless there was not a cloud in the clear night sky; the world was filled with a lambent white moonlight; and far across the silver-touched waves there was visible the dusky outline of the opposite coast, by Fort George, and Nairn, and Findhorn, and Burghead.

In a small and dimly-lit room in a farm-house, built high over that wild sea, an old—or, rather, elderly—man was seated in front of a massive

iron chest, the top of which he was carefully scraping with some kind of iron instrument. He was a man short of stature, but of powerful build; his face hard set and tanned and furrowed with wind and sun and rain; his hair almost white, and white also the bushy eyebrows set over a pair of remarkably penetrating gray eyes. This man was Robert Graham, the tenant of an extensive sheep farm; and the huge iron coffer before him, from which he was diligently scraping the last traces of whatever paint might still be visible, had been at one time the military chest of the garrison at Fort Augustus, from whence it had been allowed to fall into private hands when the fort was dismantled. But it was not the contents of this massive chest that seemed to concern the farmer; it was the few remaining touches of green paint here and there; and to aid him in the searching removal of these he had placed a solitary candle beside him, though, indeed, as the coffer stood in the window-recess, there was almost enough light coming in from the moonlit world without to enable him to prosecute his task.

Now so still and hushed was this little room

that, in spite of all the wild roar of wind and sea outside, the scratching of the iron point was quite audible; and not only that, but also certain low mutterings with which from time to time the old man gave expression to such fancies as crossed his brain. But these were broken and detached, for sometimes he relapsed into silence; and so it will be more convenient to put them down here consecutively, and in as plain language as possible.

"I am not more superstitious than most; but it's better to be on the safe side. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; but He has permitted strange things to be in the world; and maybe they have grown stronger than He intended, and can do more harm now. It's better to be friendly with both sides; and if there was a *Sith-bruth** on Fasslie, it's not a man or boy on the place would I allow to cut a twig or lift a stone there. It's live and let live; and if the little people bide in these knolls, it's not I that would be for disturbing them; even if they cannot harm a man, as some say, maybe they can harm a sheep—ay, or a score of

* *Sith-bruth*, a fairies' dwelling, generally a rocky mound, under which the fairies are supposed to live.

sheep. . . . And were there no Grahams, now, among the soldiers at Fort Augustus that they allowed this chest to be painted green? Is there a Graham alive that does not know what colour it is that is fatal to every one of the name—ay, when it is even a common story that never was a Graham shot in battle but it was found the bullet had gone through the green check of the tartan? And twice and three times I stopped bidding for it, until I said to myself—what has been put on can be taken off; and what the knife will not finish, the turpentine will finish; and where can the ill-luck come from then? The five great locks, and tricks, and contrivances to outwit a regiment; what prying eyes or fingers will get to know about my business when I have everything shut up here? Alison may think what she likes; the lass has grown saucy of late; but this is no kind of cupboard or desk that she can try with her keys when I am up on the hill. No, no, lass; what I have toiled and moiled for, that I mean to keep; and there will be no need to trust a bank in Inverness, when I have a safeguard like this iron chest. . . . But not a spot or streak of green—not a spot or a streak. Who can tell

where the ill-luck comes from? Sometimes it strikes at your blood and marrow; sometimes it's a bad lambing season; sometimes it's a bank that breaks. But I do my best to keep well with both sides; the minister has no fault to find with me; and if there are things that are stronger for good-luck or ill-luck, I do my best —ay, even to keep from naming them. Maybe that was why I got the warning that Jean Gillespie was to die—three taps on the window just half an hour before, and none hearing them but myself. And the corpse-lights on Drumsinnon Moor—it's I would have ridden along with the factor into the bog but for the lights—and I cried to him, but the cry he sent back was the cry of a drowning man. But there are some that have seen more than that, and have heard more than that; and it's well to be friends with them that can hurt and harm—whether they are below ground or above; ay, it is better to say nothing, lest they should hear evil spoken of them, and work mischief among the lambs, or bring lightning about the house, as I have heard tell. Not since I was a senseless lad have I shot a single hare—just in case there might be a mistake, and a witch or a warlock

spring up from the ground: it's better to be on the safe side."

For the moment he seemed to have done with his scraping and polishing; at all events, he laid aside the knife or chisel he had been using, and proceeded to open the chest. But this was a serious undertaking, for not only had the big key to turn five locks at once, but also there were bars and levers to be raised simultaneously, demanding the exercise of a good deal of strength. Eventually, however, the heavy lid yielded; he took both his hands to raise it, and no doubt the next minute it would have been resting against the wall or the window-sill, but that there was a sudden interruption that startled him. There was a brief, sharp tapping, and the door of the room was thrown open; at the same time the roar of the sea and the wind that seemed to fill the house rushed into the little apartment, and a cold air made the candle flame flicker. Robert Graham had not been expecting any such unceremonious visitor; he wheeled round in his chair; the lid of the chest fell from his hands and shut with an alarming noise—all the five locks and levers clanging at once; and there he found, standing before

him, the stranger who had made this sudden entrance.

And yet this was neither ghost nor wizard that confronted him; on the contrary, the newcomer was a good-looking young fellow of six-and-twenty or so, with frank eyes, close-cropped raven-black hair, and an expression of features that in ordinary circumstances might have been pleasant and friendly enough, but was now somewhat embarrassed by uncertainty. Obviously, he was a sailor; but the smartness of his costume showed that he was not an ordinary hand; in point of fact he was mate of a trading schooner then lying at Nairn; his name, Alec Jameson.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Graham," he began, with some hesitation.

"But ye do interrupt me," the other said sharply, and he scowled at the younger man from under the bushy white eyebrows. "Ye do interrupt. Think ye I have naething to do wi' my time? I'm not a gentleman that can loiter about wi' my hands in my pockets, hindering other folk, and coming where he's not wanted. Ma certes, there's some that canna take a hint to leave until they feel a horsewhip curling round their calves."

There was a flash of fire in the young sailor's eyes; but he strove to remain calm—and even courteous.

"If it's me you mean, Mr. Graham," said he quietly, "you may rest content there's not a man in this countryside will lay either hand or horsewhip on me. But let that pass——"

"What do ye want?" the old farmer said abruptly. "Time's money."

"Well, I'm off for Inverness to-morrow morning——"

"Ye're welcome."

But Jameson seemed determined to be civil, if that were possible.

"And Alison," he continued, "was asking if you and I cannot manage to part a little better friends. The lass is sorry—and no wonder—and if there's anything that I have done—if there's anything wrong that can be put right——"

"Let Alison mind her own business," was the instant rejoinder; "and I can mind mine. And what's more, neither Alison's business nor my business is any o' yours. So you're welcome to set off for Inverness as soon as ever ye like."

"I did not wish to go without holding out

my hand, and seeing if we cannot come to more peaceable terms," the young sailor said. "It's a fair offer, anyway. It must be a hard thing for a young lass to be in a position like that—troubling herself that the only friends she has should be separated by a quarrel—and a quarrel about what?—for I'm sure it's not me that knows."

"Alison wants no friends but her own kith and kin—that's enough for her," the old man said. "Why should she take up wi' strangers? What is she to gain by that? And it's not her gain, it's theirs that's in question. Ay, ay, an old man may be an old man, and still see clear enough. It's young eyes that are dazzled—it's young brains that are made a fool of; and a silly crayture of a lass will believe any smooth-spoken idle fellow that comes hanging about her and speaking her fair. But I'll have none o' that in this house, young man; so you've fair warning in time. Alison was left in my charge, and in my charge she'll bide. I'm for no interlopers here. I'm for people minding their own business. In trouble, is she?—and what's that to you? A pretty pack o' nonsense!"

"Well, yes, Mr. Graham," the younger man

said civilly, "Alison is in your charge at present; but she might not be always."

The deep-set gray eyes darted an evil glance at him, but he did not seem to notice that.

"You know what both her and me have been looking forward to," he continued, in the most pacific tone of voice, "and I am sure it would be better for every one if there was a more friendly feeling about it. And what is the objection? If she leaves the farm, there's many another you could get to keep the house——"

"And it's you that comes in to tell me what I maun do!" the old man said, glaring at him. "It's you that comes to me wi' advice. Let me tell ye, my lad, that I'm quite capable o' looking after my own affairs, as ye'll find out if ye daur to meddle wi' them. Ay, or wi' Alison's either. A clean pair o' heels—that's the best thing for you; and if Fasslie never sees ye again, Fasslie will be none the worse."

There was sufficient discourtesy in the words; but there was more in the tone in which they were uttered; and the younger man, though he strove to keep cool, began to lose the timid look of appeal that had been in his eyes.

"Well, it's a pity," he said. "Hard words

will not mend matters; and I had wished to leave Alison in happier spirits——"

"The leaving her is the best thing ye can do; and the sooner the better. Have I not bid ye never darken my door again? God bless me, is a man not to have peace and quietness in his own house?" the old farmer cried angrily.

"As to that, I am not so sure that it is your own house," the young man said quietly—though his face had gradually been becoming firmer and firmer. "But I am not a lawyer. It was Alison's father's house, I know; and I dare say he did not leave her without her share in it. But this I'm quite sure of, as long as Alison is in it, and as long as she is willing I should come to see her, I'm not going to ask anybody else's leave. I don't want to quarrel, Mr. Graham. I don't want to make matters worse. Indeed, I thought we might come to some kind of friendly understanding—if not for our own sakes, at least for Alison's. The lass is sore put about; and why need that be? Why should she be in trouble when there's no cause for it? I'm not asking her to marry to-morrow or next day; it would be when it was most convenient for her and for you."

Jameson spoke fairly and temperately, and also with a touch of hope—or, at least, of entreaty—in his look ; but the unlucky reference to the ownership of the house had caused the farmer's eyes to gleam with wrath, and now his voice, when he spoke, was hardly under his control, so fiercely angry was he.

" And how daur ye, sir—how daur ye come here to speak to me about Alison or any other in this house ? What concern have ye as to whether my niece is well or ill ? Ay, I will tell ye what your interest is—well I know that, my fine fellow, that can go about the country like a gentleman, while other folk have to work and earn their living. Alison ?—it's not Alison, but Alison's gear you're after. And ye think that a decently-brought-up girl like that will consort with an idle wastrel and gangrel—with a sailor-chap that has a wife in every port he sails to ? Get out of this house, sir—that is my answer. What ! do you think the lass is blind ? Ye come after her wi' your flattering and fawning ; but is she blind ? Doesna she see that it's her share—her small share—in the farm that you're after—that her father left her, and that I have tended as if it was my own ? And where would

it be in a year—in a week—if you had it to scatter? But she's not blind; she's not blind; you'll go the way ye came—and empty-handed as ye came!"

He paused for fair lack of breath; but meanwhile the face of the younger man had grown darker.

"Alison knows better," said he; and as if it were safer to say no more.

"Alison!" the old man said, with his voice now roused to passion pitch. "I'll have her know—ay, and you too—who is the master in this house. I'm for no gangrels and wastrels skulking about my premises—if there's a shotgun or a horsewhip handy. A fine thing, to make a fool of a silly idiot of a lass, that doesna ken the difference between an honest man and a thief—a thief that would get hold of whatever she has, and waste it in his idle courses. But that's no done yet; no, nor while I'm above ground will it be done."

"It's the first time in my life that I have ever been called a thief," Alec Jameson said, and his hands were trembling a little, though he spoke with a kind of forced composure. "Well, I intend to see who is the thief."

"What mean ye, you scoundrel?"

"I mean this—plump and plain will I tell ye what I mean," the younger man said; and it was evident that he had done now with all thoughts of pacification. "I offered to make friends wi' you—for Alison's sake. That's not to be. Well and good. You and I will settle this matter between ourselves now, Mr. Graham; and brag will not do it; and bluster will not do it; and calling names will not do it. Thief? My good man, that is a very ugly word. It's I that want to know who is the thief."

"Will you leave my house?" the farmer said, springing to his feet.

"No, I will not. And I will not leave this room until I have said my say," was the calm rejoinder, though Jameson's lips were rather pale, and his eyes full of a dangerous fire. "Mind you, Alison will be guided by me—that's one thing you may make sure of; and I'm thinking it's time there was a settlement about her share in the farm that was left her by her father. Where has that gone to all these years? Not a penny has she had to spend on herself except for clothes, and she's clad like a servant lass; she is but a servant lass, but that she gets

no wages. Where's her money? Where's her father's will, that she can tell what belongs to her? And you think that everything is to go on as it is—the lass slaving away and keeping the house for you, and never to think of altering her condition, and never to ask questions, but to let you make away with her money from year to year? But there's an end to that now—there's an end; and the lawyers in Inverness will be called in to declare who is the thief."

Rage pure and simple seemed to have paralysed the old man, but only for a few seconds. With a kind of inarticulate cry of "You scoundrel! you scoundrel!" he sprang forward with uplifted arm, as if threatening to fell his enemy. But Jameson merely held out his open hand, palm outward.

"Don't you come near me. I warn you. You're an older man than I am, and I don't want to strike you; but I will allow no man to put a hand on me. I'm going. I've said my say. I wanted to be friends with you—for Alison's sake. Now it's war. And there's them in Inverness will soon be brought to declare which of us two is the thief."

He turned abruptly and left.

"And may the lightning from heaven blast you ere ever you set foot in Inverness streets!" the older man said, scowling helplessly at the now vacant doorway.

He went back to his seat in front of the iron chest, and sate down; he was all shaking with the excitement of this stormy interview; but the anger in his heart, instead of subsiding, grew only the more fierce as he thought of the meaning of the young sailor's threats. He chanced to look out of the window at the heavily-rolling sea that was clearly visible for miles and miles in the moonlight.

"Ay," he said to himself, "that is the sailor's grave, wide and deep; that is the thing that comes to you in the end; there are no threats when there's fifty fathoms o' water above ye—and I would to God you were lying there now! The insolent scoundrel!—and he has got this brat to go with him; and the lawyers at Inverness?"

He rose and began walking up and down the small apartment, muttering to himself sometimes, as was his wont, and sometimes standing still to look out on the far stretch of wind-driven moonlit sea.

"There's them that can hurt," he was saying to himself, "and if all the stories be true, sometimes you can get them on your side, and they'll work for you—a mischief on your enemies as easily as anything else. I've heard of ships being struck by lightning coming out of a clear sky—how was that but by some interference?—but he's not on the sea, nor will be for a while yet, I suppose; the grave is waiting him there—wide and deep—wide and deep—but it may be a long time yet.'

He turned to the open door, as if fearful that these unspoken desires might be overheard; then he went to the top of the stair, and listened; there was no sound but the cry of the wind and the heavier plunge of the sea; then he returned to the room, and shut the door behind him, and resumed his dark meditations.

"The venomous snake, to come creeping into a man's house!—but I'll be even with him yet, if I burn the heather for a mile round him. Ay, I have seen them twisting themselves into a ball, and writhing and writhing as the circle of the fire came closer and closer on them; and that's how I'll have him writhe sooner or later; and then there will be a laugh! Oh, it's very

safe you are when you're burning the heather; you're on the outside of the ring; it's the adders that are in the middle, and lively enough they are when the flame comes hotter and hotter on them. And that's the flame I would have burning in his heart!"

And then he went back upon the line of thinking that had occupied him when he was scraping the last traces of paint from the lid of the iron chest.

"I have been a careful man—careful not to offend either side; and if they're friendly to me now, as I think they were when the factor rode into the bog, maybe they would help. Ay, that would be the way to get even with him, instead of waiting for the wide grave there; and maybe, if they would set to work at once, there might be a stop put to this business with the lawyers in Inverness. They say the wise women can manage it; but it's hard to get at them; the Fiscal hunts them and hunts them whenever he gets the chance; and there's scarcely a one left now. But I've heard of them now and again; and I could find out; and if the unknown people are friendly to me—if they understand that I never took a stick or a stone from a *Sith-bruth*

all the years of my life—then, my friend Jameson, I may be upsides with you: ay, it will not be the lawyers in Inverness you will be thinking of; you will be writhing like the snakes when the heather is on fire."

CHAPTER II.

BY THE SHORE.

MEANWHILE the young sailor had quickly recovered his equanimity. As he went down the stair and along the passage to the outer door of the house he was somewhat ostentatiously whistling—just in case one or other of the lads or lasses might happen to have overheard these high words. And probably in making that final appeal to the old man he had been moved rather by the wish to please pretty Alison Graham than by any distinct hope of success; and now he was no worse off than he was before; rather better he was, in truth, for this open declaration of war was preferable to mere shilly-shallying and futile balancing of probabilities. Alison would now know the worst; she would be called upon to choose for herself. And as for the taunt that it was only her money that he was after—well, he

would leave that question also to be settled by Alison ; and he thought he knew what her answer would be.

And so he left the house—fixing his cap tight in order to face the fierce gusts of wind—and set out along the road leading by the shore. If he was whistling now, no one could hear him, for all the night was filled with the rush and roar of that wide moonlit sea that came thundering in on the rocks below ; but there seemed no further need to make any such profession of cheerfulness, for apparently he was quite alone in this strangely clear and vivid world. For some little distance, as he walked smartly on, the road followed the windings of the shore ; then it struck inland somewhat, skirting a plantation of larch and spruce ; and it was at the corner of this wood that Jameson paused and looked around him, uncertain. He had not long to wait. The next moment the figure of a young woman had come quickly and quietly out from the dusk of the larches into the open moonlight : his sweetheart was clasped in his arms.

"Well, Ailie, lass, it's a wild night to be keeping you outside."

"But what said he, Alec—what said he ?" she

broke in, with a trembling anxiety in her tone. "Is it all right now, Alec? Have you made friends?"

The young sailor laughed, in an embarrassed kind of way; and pushed back the thick tartan shawl which she had thrown over her head and shoulders, so that he could get a better view of the upturned oval face, and tender dark blue eyes, and rich and abundant chestnut-brown hair. He seemed in no hurry to begin his story. Those eyes were pretty to look at, despite their eager questioning; and her brown hair that he had brought about her cheeks was soft to the touch.

"Tell me, Alec—is it good news you have?" she pleaded, for that short laugh of his sounded somewhat ominous.

"Faith, Ailie, lass, the news is none of the best," said he (though he spoke quite cheerfully, and petted and caressed her at the same time). "But it's nothing to be downhearted about—not a bit, my brave lassie. He cannot blame you for what has happened, anyway; and you'll be no worse off at the farm than before."

"But what has happened, then, Alec?" she

said, with her troubled eyes fixed intently on him.

"What has happened? Well, the fat's in the fire this time, and no mistake, and that's about what has happened, Ailie, darling," said he, rather ruefully, and yet with no deep chagrin, for he wished to make light of the whole matter. "Oh, there's to be no more beating about the bush, I warrant ye; your uncle and I have come to a plain understanding at last."

"You've quarrelled—worse than ever!" she cried.

"Well," said he, and he took the pretty oval face in his two hands, "and what is there to be frightened at? Why should your pretty eyes look so troubled—all about nothing?"

"And you said you would be patient—you said you would be patient—for my sake," she said reproachfully.

"And I was," he answered; "I was indeed. Patient? Yes, as long as might be. Well, I'll tell you the truth, Ailie. I did what I could, at the beginning. I tried to be as friendly as ever I could speak—though I would not have taken what he said to me from any other man; for I kept thinking of you, Ailie, and of your life at

the farm; and says I to myself, 'Hard words don't break bones, and it's all for Ailie's sake.' Then there came something that I could not stand——"

He paused, seemingly reluctant to go on.

"What was it, Alec?"

He regarded her in silence for a second or so, pretending to scan her face curiously.

"But if I put such things into your head, my dearie, maybe you'd think them true?"

"What things?"

"Supposing you were to hear it said that it was not you that I wanted, but your money—your share of the farm and the house?"

He affected to retreat from her a little bit, and in fact withdrew his hands from her shoulders.

"And if you told me so yourself, I would not believe you," said she simply.

"But are you sure, now, Ailie? Maybe it's true. If you were to be told that I was an idle wastrel and vagabond, with a wife in every port the *Princess Mary* sails to, and that I only wanted to get hold of your money to scatter and spend it—and to leave you when it was done, I dare say—supposing you were to hear that said of me?"

There was a proud smile on her face. She did not answer.

"Look here, Ailie," he continued. "Just consider. Maybe they're no so far wrong. Here am I with an offer from the owners of the *Princess Mary* that they'll make me skipper as soon as I can raise enough money to buy a fifth share. It's a terrible temptation for a man. And then there's a young lass at Fasslie, that ought to be well off if she had all that belongs to her; and I come courting that young lass, and telling her she's the prettiest lass in the north of Scotland—only, that's no lie, for her looking-glass can tell her as much any day in the week—and pretending that it's her I'm after, when it's the captain's cabin in the *Princess Mary* I'm after——"

"And you would have the money to-morrow morning, Alec, if I had it to give you," said she, which was a quite illogical climax to these speculations of his.

"But wait a minute, Ailie," he said. "For this you'll never guess. I go to see the uncle of the young lass, to make peace with him, and win him over; but he'll no hear of anything of the kind; and what is all the quarrel about?—

why, it's about the young lass's property, and her share in this and that, and what the lawyers in Inverness would have to say. Money—money—money—is the whole cry. Very well. And yet you say you would not believe that of me?"

"And maybe it's not the first time I have heard such things hinted," said she, with a smile; and, indeed, if he remained apart and affected to scrutinise her, the look that she bestowed on him in return had not much of doubt or distrust in it. "Oh, yes; and many's the time I have been glad to think that something would be coming to me—if my uncle would only make up the accounts. For, if we were to marry, Alec——"

"*If* we were to marry?" he cried, and he came nearer her again, and took hold of her by the two shoulders.

"Well, when we marry," she said, with downcast eyes, "it will be something to start the house with, wherever we may choose to live. Oh yes; and the share in the ship, too—if it is possible; do you think you would be five minutes without that, if I had the money in my hand? Would it not be for my good as well as for yours, my dear?"

"Yes, yes," said he, "for there's the captain's cabin, Ailie, and you could come a voyage with me now and again, and I would introduce you to my other wives in the different places."

"I am not afraid of that," she said.

"Well, now, Ailie," said he, speaking more seriously, "when that was cast in my teeth—that it was your money I was after—I could not stand that. To be called a thief, too: ay, and who is the thief? says I. Where is the money you have kept back from Alison all these years? What kind of a story will the lawyers have to make out? For it was a stiffish quarrel, Ailie, darling, and that's a fact; and it's all over between him and me, for certain; and we've got to make the best of matters as they stand. It's never again shall I be within that house; that's fixed: no, it's you that have to come to me now; I will never be inside that house again."

"Alec! Alec!" she said, in a voice of deep entreaty. "Surely it is not so bad as that! I asked you to be patient——"

"Patient, lassie!" he exclaimed. "I tell you I was as patient as man ever was. Bless me, I had to warn him back, or he would have struck

me with his fist. The man's mad, I'm thinking; or else it's this—that he is keeping back even more than we suspect, and that the very mention of lawyers is enough to drive him out of his wits. Well, what's done is done; what we have to do is the next thing. You see, lass, I have no right to interfere in your affairs at all."

"And why not, Alec?" said she. "And if not you, who else, then? It's not my uncle I would look to. I think he would be glad if I were dead and out of the way."

"No doubt; that's the very thing that would suit him; but we cannot just oblige him so far as that, lass," Jameson said. "Out of the way, maybe; yes, we may take ye out of the way—or out of his way, rather; but if ye were to be ruled by me—or if it was my business to interfere—he would soon find out that ye were not dead at all, but very much alive."

"What would you have me do, Alec? I have none to look to but you. What is it you want me to do?" said she, with absolute trust in her eyes.

"Leave Fasslie," said he at once, "and come and live with my mother at Nairn for a few weeks. Then we will get married, and then I

will have the right to interfere in your affairs—and who else?"

She sighed a little.

"It's a pity," she said, at length. "I thought some friendly arrangement might be made. Why should my uncle be set against it? He will have plenty, even after I go."

"Perhaps there is a little settling up of accounts that might be inconvenient," the young man suggested, drily; but instantly he added, in a tone of vexation, "But how is it that money, and money, and money, seems to fill the whole of this night? No, no; I will not interfere. Somebody else must guide ye, lass. Take advice, now. Go to some shrewd-witted person, and just tell the truth. Say you have a sweetheart and you are not sure of him——"

"Alec!" she said, and forthwith the pretty appealing blue eyes began to fill with tears.

"But it's the way of the world, you foolish creature!" he said, with pretended anger. "How do you know that your uncle is not right?"

"It is no use your speaking like that—to me," she said proudly. "No, and it is not fair, Alec. And it is not so much time we have

together that you should throw it away in speaking nonsense."

"Well, then, will you leave Fasslie?"

For answer she clutched his hand, in affright. Her feminine watchfulness had caught sight of something that he had not noticed at all—the figure of a man away along there on the white moonlit road.

"It's my uncle," she said; and instinctively she caught her lover by the arm and drew him further into the dusk of the trees.

But they could still easily make out the dark figure coming along the white road; nay more, they could observe his every movement. And presently it was apparent that he was searching every nook and cranny along the shore; and they guessed readily enough that he had come out in quest of his niece, having missed her in the house. Jameson and his sweetheart stood perfectly still—behind the screen of young larches and spruce. As for the young man, he was quite aware that the farmer would be in a violent temper, but he did not heed that much; he merely thought it would be an excellent joke if Alison's uncle were to go by their hiding-place, so that the girl might get home before him.

And if he did find her, what more could he do than scold? and he, Jameson, would take care that the words were not too uncivil.

But the next moment a quick pang of dismay—or of anger—or of both together—shot through his heart. The old man carried a horsewhip! A horsewhip—and for whom? Would he dare to raise it against her—even by way of a threat—as he drove her home? All the young man's blood was on fire. A horsewhip—to his Alison?

"Here, lass, come along; I want to see what this means."

He took her hand and led her out into the road. When the old farmer came along, they were standing right before him.

"And it's there ye are, ye limmer, ye hussy—disgracing an honest man's house!" he said, in tones of suppressed rage; but he did not come any nearer, for Jameson had stepped forward. "Home wi' ye—home wi' ye—ye shameless hussy!"

The two men were now face to face.

"Another word like that to the lass," the younger man said, "and by the Lord I'll heave you on to the rocks there!"

A timid hand was put on his arm; he shook it off.

"Leave me alone, lass; we're going to settle this thing now and here."

"Settle it?" the old farmer said, and the horsewhip that he held in his hand shook and trembled with the violence of his passion. "And who are you, sir, that daur to come between me and her? I tell you I will have the mastery of her so long as she bides in my house. I will not have the very name of the place disgraced by her wandering about at night wi' a vagabond. Out of the way, now—and you, you limmer, home wi' ye, ere the very servants come out to mock ye."

And perhaps he would have gone forward to seize her by the arm and drag her home but that the young sailor who stood before him did not show the slightest intention of stepping aside. On the contrary, he was very much in the way, and remained so; and there was a kind of sarcasm in his look.

"Yes; it's a fine home for her to go to," said he (for he was not much of a hand at scolding), "and it's a fine guardian you've been to her—just as if she had been your own bairn. Oh

yes, saving up for her, and scraping everything together for her—it was just out o' kindness, I suppose, that she has scarcely ever had a sixpence to spend on herself—yes, and selling the pony that her father bought for her—that was to add up too, I suppose——"

"Alec, Alec!" the girl said, trying to interpose. "And you, uncle—why should there be a quarrel?"

"Will ye go home—will ye go home, I tell ye?" the old man roared.

"No, she will not go home until it suits her own convenience," Jameson said, and he seemed to grow more and more cool and quiet in demeanour the greater the rage of his antagonist became. "It's a nice home you've made for her since her father died, and it's a pleasant life the lass has had to lead. Well, that's about over now. If it's news to you, you're welcome: Alison is going to leave Fasslie."

"Leave Fasslie!" the other gasped: it seemed, then, there was a conspiracy between these two? They had laid their heads together to dare him—to try to cheat him out of that hoard that he had been so diligently amassing ever since the management of the farm fell into his hands?

"Uncle, I do not wish to leave Fasslie," Alison pleaded; and she had been crying a little over this wrangle that seemed so hopeless, and that seemed to bode so much trouble for the future.

"No, nor will ye leave Fasslie with my will, ye graceless hussy!" he cried. "What, leave the place ye were born in—and for what? To face the world with an idle vagabond——"

"Vagabond he is not!" she exclaimed, firing up at the word. "And you will do no good with me, uncle, by speaking ill of him——"

"Ailie, lass, what does it matter?" her lover interposed; but she was not to be interrupted: she would have her say out.

"And I did not wish to leave Fasslie; but what else is there now? What can I do but that? There will be no peace——"

"What else is there?" he bellowed—for he was like a madman in his impotent fury: Jameson standing there facing him, and daring him to advance a step. "What else? There's a whip to curl round your shoulders, ye impudent limmer——"

"Ay?" said Jameson quickly. "Is that it, then?"

Before the farmer could tell what had happened the horsewhip was snatched from his hand, the stick of it snapped in two, and both pieces whirled away through the air—and falling, indeed, on the rocks below them.

"And it's the same for you, if you like, my man," the young sailor said, with his eyes afire. "Would you like to follow? A horsewhip—to a young lass? To speak of such a thing—you white-headed old thief and coward! By the Lord I wonder I can let you stand there."

For a moment it seemed as if the old man were about to rush upon his antagonist (who was sorely hampered, too, by Alison clinging to him and trying to pull him away) but he suddenly changed his mind; he turned and strode off, crunching the stones in the road in the blind fury of his wrath; and plainly enough they could hear him say, "I'll have the dogs down; I'll have the dogs down, and chase ye from the countryside, ye scoundrel vagabond."

And then Jameson turned to his sweetheart, who was all trembling and sobbing and frightened; and he would wipe the tears away from her pretty face; and he called her all kinds of soft pet names, and bade her be of courage.

"For you see how matters stand now, Ailie, my dear," said he, and he smoothed her hair back from her forehead, as if he would have nothing come between him and the open clear depths of her eyes. "And it's no use hoping that a madman will become a reasonable man. Your life at the farm will be a misery as long as you bide there; and I am not afraid to ask you to come away; anything will be better than that; and, when you are living with my mother, then there will be time and peace and comfort for you to consider what you will do next. No, I am not afraid to ask you to do as much as that, for that will be for your good, I know——"

"But I will do anything you tell me, Alec," said she, and her absolute confidence in him was apparent as much in her manner as in her words, "for I have no one in the world to guide me but you."

"You have your own common sense, Ailie. And you must know that sailors have an ill name. And you must not trust me any further than what a stranger would say was right."

"But I do trust you; and how can you help that?" said she, with a smile struggling through her tears.

"Then I'll have to guard you against yourself; and very easy it will be; for, when you're living in Nairn, we'll just get the lawyer folk to tie up whatever money ye may have—I mean, whatever money they may be able to get from your uncle——"

"But they cannot tie it up if I want to give it to you," said she. "And, oh, Alec, wouldn't it be fine if we could buy the fifth share in the ship—and you to be made captain!"

"Yes, and what would be just as fine would be this—if we were to rent a small cottage just outside Nairn, or Elgin, or Inverness; and you to have a little garden to amuse yourself wi' when I'm away, and a little servant-lass to help you—you see, Ailie, everything's to be little—the cottage, the garden, the servant-lass—it's like the old song, you know, 'When a little farm we keep'—I say, everything is to be little except one thing, and that is the love of your heart, Ailie."

"But you cannot expect me to keep that little," said she, regarding him with her fond, trusting eyes. "Anything else—except that."

"No, no, you will keep that as big as you can, my dear, as long as it is mine," said he.

Then he bethought him of the farmer's parting threat.

"Well, I must be off, Ailie, for I don't want to be worried by a lot of yelping collies."

"Oh, do you think the dogs would harm any one that is with me?" she said confidently.

"Well, it's no use having any more quarrelling; there's been enough of that for a while. And, as soon as I get back, I will go through to Nairn, and my mother will arrange for your coming—and the sooner the better. The *Princess Mary* will not be ready for a week yet, and you could write and say where I am to meet you——"

"But if my uncle will not let me leave the farm?"

"How is he to hinder you?"

"He might lock me up in a room," said Alison.

And loudly he laughed.

"I'm thinking that would not last long, Ailie, my dear! I'm thinking I would soon have some of the lads with me, and we'd get you out, if we stripped the slates off the roof. No, no; it's when you want to leave the farm, you'll leave it —I will take care of that; and your room will

be ready for you in Nairn—as neat and clean and smart as a new pin."

And then at length he had to go ; and he had comforted her amazingly, and she was smiling through her tears ; and when the final good-bye was said, and the last hand-shake and kiss given and taken, and the last, long, lingering look withdrawn, she turned and took her way towards the solitary farm-house, through the loud-reverberating, clear, moonlight night.

CHAPTER III.

A CONSPIRACY.

INVERNESS is not much of a seaport, and the occasional rows of small houses in the neighbourhood of the almost disused quays are visited by but few passers-by, especially in the day-time. And yet old Robert Graham, as he slowly walked along one of these solitary thoroughfares—pretending to saunter idly and aimlessly, indeed, as if he had only wandered hither by chance—had a keenly apprehensive look in his deep-set eyes, and he was sharply and covertly watching the movements of every human being within sight, at however great a distance he or she might be. As a matter of fact, there was only one person who could by any possibility be a spy on him; and that was a man who, slung over the side of a big schooner lying high and dry on the mud, was working on the hull, while his back

was turned on the street, and, moreover, he was engaged with his own affairs, hoarsely singing the while some dolorous sailor song.

Twice and three times did the old farmer slowly walk up and down this empty street, though well he knew the house he was seeking, for it had been shown him the evening before, towards dusk, when the dim light in the window seemed to him something mysterious and awful, and the very silence around unholy. And now, when he at length mustered up courage to approach the door that his eye had been stealthily fixed on for some time back, there was a curious sensation of dread about his heart, and the hand that he timidly raised to the rude iron knocker was shaking a little, though he did not notice that. He hesitated but for a second; he rapped, but not loudly; the next moment the door was opened.

A tall, thin, gray-haired, quiet, and respectable-looking woman stood before him, regarding him with mild and melancholy eyes. She carried in her hand a piece of sewing; apparently she had been at work.

"Yes, sir?" she said inquiringly; and, mild and melancholy as those eyes appeared, they

seemed to have scrutinised him from head to foot in the meanwhile.

Mr. Graham was rather taken aback. Could this quiet-looking creature be one of the two wise women—the spey-wives—that foretold the fortunes of the young lasses about, and sold charms to sailors, and were suspected of even darker dealings? He had expected to find a couple of venomous old hags, crouching in some dark chimney-corner, to whom he could at once have revealed his designs, beseeching their aid to rid him of his enemy. However, he was a little bewildered, and a little frightened,—and at length he managed to say:

"Nancy Lissom?"

"That's my sister's name," was the calm answer, and the scrutiny of those mild but watchful eyes was continued.

"I want to see her," he said.

"The poor old woman's no so well the now," she said; "I would rather no disturb her."

"But I maun see her—it's business—it's important," the farmer said, rather breathlessly.

"I dinna see how that can be," the other answered him. "It's me that minds the house; and the rent's paid, and the taxes, and the

water, and everything; and we dinna owe a penny to any living, though it's a hard enough struggle for two old folk like her and me."

"Bless me, woman, I ken a' about you and your sister," said he, impatiently—for he did not wish to be seen talking at this door. "Let me inside the house, and I'll tell ye what I want."

"Ye're welcome to come in, sir," she said, and she made way for him to pass, and shut the door after him; "but if a' the magistrates in Inverness were to come into this house they would find nothing wrong—only two old wives making but a scant living wi' their needle—ay, and one o' them getting so blind now that she can scarce add a stitch."

"I'm not a magistrate," said he, almost under his breath, for the little room into which he was ushered seemed strangely quiet.

And indeed there was no suggestion of necromancy about this commonplace little apartment. It was just such another as one might have expected in that neighbourhood, only that it was cleanly and tidily kept, however poor and plain the furniture might be. There were the usual ornaments on the mantelpiece—big sea-shells,

two cheap glass vases surmounted each with a frill of green paper, and one or two photographs in frames. But what the farmer instantly noticed was that on the little table at the window, where the family Bible ought to have been, no family Bible was there; in place of that there was merely a flower-pot, with some red and yellow paper flowers in it, to attract the gaze of the passer-by without. Then he turned to the melancholy-eyed woman, who stood calmly waiting for him to speak.

"I want to be friends wi' ye, and wi' your sister," said he. "I'm not a magistrate at all. I've heard o' ye. I've come here to ask your help—ay, and I'll pay weel for it. But it was Nancy Lissom I was told to ask for."

"My sister's in there," the woman said, nodding her head in the direction of a door behind him, and still continuing to regard him with suspicion. "But she's a poor old woman now, that can scarce talk to strangers. And if ye've come to do us an ill turn, sir, I wish ye would go away again. We harm nobody. We jist want to be let alone——"

"An ill turn, ye foolish woman!" he said angrily; and then he instantly altered his tone:

"No, no, I want to be friends wi' ye; if ye can give me any help, I'll make it worth your while. Look here."

He took out from his breast-pocket a small parcel of £1 bank-notes—dark and dirty as these usually are in the country districts of Scotland—and, selecting two of them from the rest, placed them open on the table.

"There's a handsel," said he.

When the woman saw the two bank-notes lying there, her eyes contracted like the eyes of a cat about to spring, and instinctively she was about to seize them. But then she paused. She looked at him.

"Is it a trap?"

She went quickly to the window, and, as well as she could, glanced up and down the street to see if he had any accomplice waiting without. There was no one there. She returned to the table, and took up the notes, and said, with a kind of sigh—

"I'm sure, sir, ye wouldna seek to harm two poor old women, and one o' them near to her death, as I'm thinking. But nowadays it's a sin and an outcry if ye take a pack o' cards and tell a lass whether her sweetheart is to be dark

or fair. Not that I ken anything about that, or that I would do sic a thing; but come in and see my sister, and tell her what your business is: folk call her a wise woman—but what's that? It's just that she has the skill and experience o' a long life, and many a one she has helped, though many's the ill name that both o' us get in return for it. And did I thank ye for the money, sir?—it's a poor life we lead, for she's nearly blind, and I'm not so quick with the needle as I was."

She opened a door in the partition severing the lower floor of the house, and preceded him into the back-room. It was about the same size as the one in front, but much more poorly furnished, and it was darker also. There was a small fire burning in the grate, though it was far from being cold weather without; and in an easy-chair by the side of the fire sate a little old woman—older than her sister, and whiter of hair—who was wrapped up in a thick shawl and wore on her head an old-fashioned "mutch."

She looked startled, and even frightened, when she saw the stranger, and quickly turned to her sister.

"It's a' right, Nancy," the taller woman said.

"The gentleman has gi'en me a good hansel; and I'll leave him to tell ye his business himsel'."

So saying, she withdrew; and then the interview on which the old farmer had staked all his vengeful hopes began. And at first it proceeded slowly enough; for the little old woman—who seemed to have remarkably sharp eyes, considering that her sister had said she was nearly blind—would admit nothing; pretended that she only gave good advice; then admitted that she practised a little harmless forecasting by means of cards; and so forth. At times, the farmer grew angry; then, fearing to offend her, would become quite humble again; and finally he had recourse to further money persuasion. The fact was, he was desperate. If they could not help, who could? Would he have to part with his niece, and her share of the profits of the farm that he had held back, and her share of the stock as it stood, and all because an insolent young puppy had chosen to interfere? And this was the only way of meeting him; and time pressed; and why would this old woman—that he had been assured had dark and mysterious relations with the unseen powers—prevaricate, and make false assurances, and refuse to aid him?

But this further bribe—though the parting with these two pounds was like rending his heart in twain—prevailed, and the little old woman rose from her chair and hobbled across the apartment, and for a minute or two was busy in a small cupboard there. When she came back she had something or other wrapped up in her apron.

"Ay, ay," said she, in her quavering voice, as she sank into the easy-chair again and pretended to keep her eyes fixed absently on the fire, "if the police or the Fiscal was coming he would be here ere now; and it's only when one is sure that one can speak out; and it's no often nowadays, when there's so few that believes—there's so few that believes. Well, well, poor things, maybe it's better they shouldna ken what's going to happen—what use is it to them to ken beforehand that the head o' the house will never come back frae sea, or that the bairn will be ta'en from them, or that the money they hope for will never be theirs? And if they dinna believe that harm can be fended off—weel, weel, they must suffer, poor things. It wasna so once. I mind the days when folk were glad to take warning—ay, and to pay

for the warning—and to take heed—and guard themsels against the ill that was coming. But there's few that believe nowadays, and a poor old wife has amaist lost the secret o't, though it's them that's nearest the grave that can see best."

He lēt her mumble on, apparently to herself; for partly he was hoping that she would of herself come to the mysterious art of which he was in quest; but partly also because he was a little bit overawed. There was something gruesome in being in solitary converse with a reputed witch; she did not seem to heed him now; she kept her eyes on the smouldering fire as if she saw things there—shipwrecks, funerals, children crying, women sitting and moaning alone. And if the hope in his heart burnt fiercer, it also made him afraid. He was coming close to these awful and unknown influences: and how might they not affect himself? He had been most propitiatory to this old woman and her sister—but, after all, they were only instruments. And when once his purpose was known, would the vague powers that compassed evil and harm be on his side, and work with him and for him, or might they not turn against him and wither him with their malignant craft?

And now that she was satisfied he did not mean to betray her—that he was in reality seeking supernatural aid, and willing to pay for the same—she seemed bent on convincing him that he had not come hither in vain.

"But there's no many now that care to be warned," she continued, still vacantly staring into the fire. "It was different in former days. Maybe ye've heard o' Willox the Warlock?"

"I remember the name, but I never saw him," the farmer said, and the very sound of his own voice made him start, so intently occupied had he been with his fancies and his fears.

"Poor man, he died in 'thirty-three. I mind him weel. Macgregor was his real name. And do ye ken what gave him power over spirits—ay, so that he could raise a storm on a loch and drown a boat ere ever warning could reach them? It was what they call a talisman that had been handed down to him; and this was the way of it. In former days there was a water-kelpie in Loch Ness, and he would linger on the road by the side of the loch in the shape of a fine horse all saddled and bridled, and when some tired traveller would come along and fain get a ride for a mile or twa, no sooner was

he in the saddle than down into the loch ran the kelpie and drowned him. But one o' the Macgregors heard o' the kelpie, and attacked him, and slashed at the head o' the horse with his claymore, and cut away the end o' the bridle and a piece o' the bit; and it was this that was handed down to Willox the Warlock, as they called him, and many a strange thing he did wi' it, as the folk will tell ye till this day. Well, sir, ye hae been kind to two poor auld women; and I'm sure ye're no in league with the police; and I'm just going to show ye that very talisman —that was well known in this countryside when I was a young lass."

She opened her apron, and took up a piece of yellow metal, and held it out for him to look at. But he would not touch it; he did not know what subtle power it might yet possess—and perhaps for evil to the unwary.

"And what can ye do with that, then?" he said, almost in a whisper; and he had a sudden vision of Alec Jameson, and of a storm, just outside Nairn harbour, and of a sinking ship, and then a wide, empty sea, with darkness and night and silence coming down on it.

"It's no much that I can do wi' that," said

she absently. "The day has gone by. The folk dinna believe in water-kelpies now——"

"Ay, but if there was one ready to believe?" said he eagerly. "What then? what then, goodwife?"

She had taken from her lap another object—an oblong piece of crystal, pierced with several holes.

"Here," she said, "is the other talisman that Willox the Warlock used, and maybe there's more to be done wi' that, if ye would learn what's going to happen. Ay, there's many a strange thing has been seen through that glass—many a thing that has come true when least it was expected; for days are no more than hours, and years no more than days, when ye look through it. Would ye like to try?"

Well, this was not what he came for; but he was afraid to offend her; and how could he tell but that at any moment she might suggest the very means that he desired? So he assented; and in a kind of half-mystified way he saw her go and fetch a bowl of clear water, which she placed in front of the fire.

"Kneel down," said she, "and put the glass

on the top of the water, and tell me if ye see anything on the bottom of the bowl."

He would rather not have touched the piece of crystal; but on the other hand, he did not know what danger he might incur by refusing; so he did as he was bid. Of course, when the crystal was interposed between the glow of the fire and the bowl of water, there were shadows thrown on the bottom of the vessel, and sharper lights where the holes were pierced; and then again these seemed to move, for he did not himself know that his hand was so trembling and unsteady.

"If it's waves," she said slowly, and her eyes could now watch him unseen, "it's a voyage."

There was no answer; he was puzzling over those mysterious shadows, and too perturbed to make a definite guess.

"If it's trees——" she continued.

"Ay, it's more like trees, I'm thinking," he muttered.

"If it's trees, it's a kirk-yaird," she said.

He sprang to his feet.

"A kirk-yaird—for whom?" he cried, perfectly aghast.

But the old woman took no notice of this sudden fright.

"How can I tell that," said she, in the same calm voice, "until I hear what it is ye want to learn? Indeed, I'll do my best for ye, sir, though there's nothing sure—there's nothing sure. But ye've been a good friend to us this day—I'll do my best."

Here, then, was the opportunity he wanted; and he strove to collect himself. He reverently placed the piece of crystal and the bowl on the table—for, although fortune-telling was not what he was after, still, these things might work mischief—and then he began his story. Truth to say, it was a very transparent fabrication. It needed no witch to tell that he was speaking of himself and his own affairs. The story was of a farmer dwelling in a certain place, who lived soberly and discreetly, trying to do his best by the farm, and saving up every penny that he could save. And why? Because he had a niece who in the ordinary course of nature would fall heir to the property. But was she content with that? No. The idle hussy must needs take up with a harum-scarum young sailor fellow; and now he was for taking her away from

the house ; and he was going to the lawyers to make the farmer hand over all that was due to her (though that had mostly been expended in the bringing of her up), and also the value of her share in the stock, no doubt. And not only that, but this impudent rascal of a sailor had challenged the farmer to fight, and had miscalled him, and would have lashed him with a horse-whip, but that the whip broke in his hands. And could she wonder, he asked eagerly, if he wanted to baffle the intentions of this robber and plunderer—ay, and take vengeance on him for his threats and his scorn ? And was there no way of doing that ? The farmer would pay, he said ; oh yes, he would pay when the work was done. Hardly as he had earned every penny of his savings, he would do much to save his niece from becoming the slave of such a scoundrel.

"That, now," he said, fixing his eyes on the piece of yellow metal that lay in her hand, "could not that work him a mischief ? "

"I'm no sure about that," she answered. "There's other ways—ay, there's other ways o' working a harm, if it was safe to do it. But I maun have the name o' the farmer and o' the young sailor-lad," she added.

"Surely that's no needfu'?" he said, rather drawing back.

"Indeed, but it is," she said doggedly.

He was loth to compromise himself so far, but on the other hand, being apparently so near the accomplishment of his wishes, and having risked so much already, he could not think of giving up.

"Graham," said he, with evident timidity, "that is the farmer's name, and the sailor fellow's Jameson."

At the mention of the latter name there was a sudden little twitch of the old woman's eyes, which he did not notice, and she slowly said to him:

"But his other name? I mean the sailor-lad's."

"Oh, that's Alec," he said; he had less scruple about giving her that information.

"And it's him that wants the young lass with the money?" she said, with a quick glance at him.

Then she resumed her absent staring into the fire again. He remained regarding her in silence. He guessed that she was devising sure and certain means for the destruction of his enemy, and would not interfere.

"It's dangerous work," she said, at length.

"Ay, but when it's done it will be well paid for," said he eagerly. "Can ye do it—can ye do it, goodwife? Can ye bring something upon him? Or can ye whisper them that can—something quick and sudden, now, ere he gets time to go to the lawyers? I tell ye, the lass is talking o' leaving the farm at once, and together they'll be at the lawyers; haste ye to think now, can ye make something befall him—something sharp and sudden, that will end him for ever? It was a kirk-yaird I saw in the bowl, I'm sure o't—trees and bushes it was that I saw—a kirk-yaird it was—and was that for him, goodwife?"

She seemed to pay but little heed to his malignant vehemence. For a little while she sate perfectly silent and apparently absorbed. And then she said, slowly—

"There's the old and the sure way, if ye are daring enough to do it."

"What is't—what is't?" he said quickly.

She looked up again.

"Are ye so hard set against the lad?"

"Wife, wife, ye dinna understand what he threatens to me and mine!" he exclaimed, but in a low voice. "Tell me what's to be done and

leave the rest to me. And quick, quick, it maun be—ere the scoundrel gets to the lawyers."

Inadvertently he had confessed that he himself was the farmer of his imaginary story; but she knew that already.

"It's the old and the sure way," she repeated, in the same slow fashion. "Ye take a wax image, and ye make ready a big fire, and ye put the image before the fire, and when it begins to melt, sickness strikes at his heart. Ay, and he pines and he pines, and no one can tell what is the matter with him; and on the second day ye put the image to the fire again, and ye begin to stick needles into it, and with every needle ye say,

'Fire burn, fire stew,
Another knife I stick in you,'

until the image is finished: ay, and when that's finished, the man's finished, and it's the kirk-yaird then for him, and a cold stone at his head."

"And the wax image—where could one get that, goodwife?" said he, almost in a whisper.

She regarded him.

"Come here to-night at nine o'clock to the minute, and it will be ready for ye," she

answered. "And mind ye let no one see your coming in or your going out; for it's compassing a man's life, and what does that mean, if it's found out, but the gallows?"

He started, for there almost seemed a menace in her tone; but surely she was as much implicated as he himself was? However, he promised to be there punctually at nine that evening, in the utmost secrecy; and so he got out of the house and into the quiet little thoroughfare. As he made his way back to the busier parts of the town, the white daylight around seemed to have a bewildering effect on his eyes; and his heart was darkened with a nameless dread; and his brain was busy trying to recall the ghastly incantation he was to use when he put the waxen image of his enemy before the sharp flames.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORKING OF THE CHARM.

TOWARDS nine o'clock that night the moon was not yet over the chimney-tops, and this little thoroughfare that he sought with stealthy step and anxious look was dark and solitary enough. And well he wished himself out of Inverness, and back home; at Fasslie he could take safe and leisurely precautions to avoid observation; here he knew not what silent foot might be following him, what unseen eye might be upon him, nor yet what fell enchantment might not be hovering around this very house that he was about to visit. He was a little before the appointed time; he walked round by the quay, and back again; and ever his attention was fixed on that particular window, where a dull red light shone. What was it that made that light look baleful and sinister? He wished this

business was over, and himself back at Fasslie Farm.

So far as he could perceive, he was quite unobserved as he finally went up to the house, tapped lightly, and was admitted. Not a word was spoken by the taller of the two women, who received him as on the previous occasion; she merely opened the door of the back room, and shut it behind him when he had entered. Then the next moment his startled glance fell upon something that was lying there on the table—something that made him shiver, though he had never seen the like before; for the waxen image that lay amongst some cotton fitted into a small box, however rudely it may have been fashioned, seemed to him like a corpse, and to have the cold, clammy, clayey look of a corpse. He turned to the old woman, dreading to find her eyes fixed on him and reading alike his desires and his fears; but her face was away from him; she was staring blankly into the fire.

"Ay, and what now, goodwife?" said he pretending not to have seen that ghastly object lying there.

"It's ready for ye," said she, and she turned and glanced at the table. "There is that will

make a sick man of him, and syne a dead man. Ay, that's the sure way; surer than the talisman that Willox the Warlock cut frae the kelpie's mouth."

"And when will it begin to work, goodwife?" said he anxiously. "Maybe he's in Inverness at this minute, maybe he'll no wait for the young lass to come from the farm, maybe he'll go to the lawyers and make mischief ere he can be stopped. When will it begin to work, tell me; when will he fall ill?"

"As soon as ever that wax is put to the low, and begins to melt," said she, "then the sickness will strike into him. It's a dreadfu' thing to think of—a young man in the prime and health o' life——"

"Ay, but such a rascal as ye ne'er heard o'," said he eagerly, for he did not wish her to repent of her connivance; perhaps she might recall the charm at the last moment. "I tell ye, ye do well to work harm on such a worthless mischievous fellow—ay, a rascal that would rob an old man, and steal away a lass from her proper home, and seek to get hold o' her money to spend it on riotous living. Na, na, dinna fash your head about that, goodwife; he deserves all

he'll get, and mair. It's a good job ye've done."

And then he turned to the table, and regarded the rudely-shaped little effigy.

"And maun I keep it at the fire melting and melting to the end?" said he, for now that the means were within his reach, he seemed impatient to begin.

"No, no," she answered him. "Three days must go by, and if at the end o' the third day it's no a' melted away, then into the fire wi't—poor young fellow, that will be his death-hour."

"But when I take away the wax frae the fire, will the illness stop?" he asked.

"No, no; when ye take the wax frae the fire, it will harden; but when once a man is struck with a pining, that holds him—ay, until it's time for the tramp o' the coffin-men to be heard on the stair."

"And no matter where he is, will this reach him?" he said.

"Ay, whether he is on sea or land—far or near—in a rich man's house or a poor—when the wax is put to the low, then the pining and wasting begins, and every time ye put a needle into the wax, that is a pain going through his

heart. Bethink ye, sir, what ye are doing, and spare him if ye can. My sister and me, we're poor folk; and it's ill to get a living in such hard times as these; and I'm sure we would rather keep to the sewing, if my eyes were no so bad. It's no my own will that I would meddle wi' such things as that. I wouldna harm a living soul."

He seemed to pay no heed to these pleadings, except in so far as they tended to confirm his belief in the deadly power of this instrument she had made for him; and now—but with rather uncertain fingers—he had taken the box up in his hand.

"But what's this, goodwife?" he said suddenly. "What colour is this box? Green, surely? Ay, that will never do at a'. Ye'll have to get me another box; there'll be no good-luck to me or mine if I take aught o' that colour into the house. Bless me, it's a wonder I noticed it in candle-light."

"There's not another box o' the kind, but or ben," said she.

"Well, well," said he, "I'll take it wi' me as it is, and get another ere I set out for home in the morning;" and with that he put the lid on,

and tied a bit of string round it, and was ready to go.

"But ye're no leaving us that way," said she, with a kind of feeble, whining remonstrance, "after a' our trouble? We're poor, poor folk, my sister and me; and what wi' the police and the Fiscal and the neighbours spying on us, and glad to say an ill word when they can, it's a hard struggle to live. And this practising on a man's life, that we risk the gallows by—is that not to be paid for?"

"But I've given ye four pounds, woman!" he said angrily.

And then he quickly bethought him that this was not the tone in which to address one who might turn these very powers against himself.

"But dinna let's quarrel," said he. "No, no. See, here's another: that's five, and a good day's wage. But it's not five, but twice five, ye'll have from me when this work's done. Ten pounds will I give ye on that day; just mind that now, and ye'll be looking forrit to the end as eager as I am mysel'. And so good-night to ye, goodwife; and just keep a quiet tongue in your head about this affair until I see ye again."

And so he got him out of the house, and stole quietly away back to the inn where he was lodging. There he succeeded in getting a box something of the same size as the green one; and when he had transferred to it the deadly instrument that was to work woe on his enemy, he felt more at ease. And late into the night he sate up in his solitary little room, wondering at what hour of the following evening he would begin to melt the wax figure, and wondering where 'Alec Jameson would be when first he should find himself smitten with that strange sickness. Compunction, remorse, hesitation, he had none. He was all too anxious to strike. Not only revenge for the past but regard for his own safety in the future goaded him on. And how could any one call it murder when he but melted a doll at a fire—as any child might do? If there were maleficent beings who would make that the occasion for working a man's bane, he knew them not. But if these invisible powers befriended him now, as they had befriended him in times past, surely he would be grateful to them, though he might never know how to call them by their name? The old woman, too: he would establish friendly re-

lations with her; it was better to be safe with every one all round.

He reached home the following afternoon, and he was unusually civil to his niece—but in a suspicious, watchful way—when that he chanced to meet her about the house. Again, as they sate down to supper in the evening, he said, with an appearance of good-humour:

"Well, now, if ye have any sense, lass, ye'll change your mind about leaving Fasslie."

"And indeed, uncle," she said, "it is no wish of mine that I should leave Fasslie—at least, not the now; and if I have to go, it will be with no great gladness."

"But who can make ye go if ye dinna want to go?" he said eagerly. "Think o't, lass; think o' the chances o' life, and you going out to face them by yoursel'. Yes, by yoursel'; for what better is a sailor's wife than a left widow woman when he's away at sea? Ay, and the chances o' storms and shipwrecks—think o' that, and you living by yoursel' and waiting and waiting. That's a terrible life for a young lass to lead. Here ye've a comfortable home, where your father's name is still weel kenned in the countryside; and there's friends for ye in time

o' trouble; and ye can see that everything that's done to better the house or the buildings or the farm, that's a' being done for what is your own—or for what will be your own when I am taken. It's a sad thing to see a young lass beguiled and led away from her own folk—where she has everything and no trouble—and to see her going out to face the world by hersel', among strangers that ken nothing about her or hers, and will swindle her, or misca' her, or cheat her, whenever they get the chance. It's a sad, sad thing to see; and I never thought it would be you, Ailie, lass."

He had never spoken like this to her before. Ordinarily he was querulous, dissatisfied, complaining, in his manner towards her, and oftentimes downright ill-tempered, dictatorial, and brutal. And for a second or two this plausible reasoning and the apparent friendliness of his tone rather bewildered her; but presently she said:

"It's too late to think o' that, uncle. I have given my word to Alec Jameson, and I'm not going to take it back."

"It's never too late to mend an error," said he—and he was watching her with some eager-

ness, as if he expected to see some sign of yielding in her face.

"And as for being a sailor's wife," she continued, "I suppose every one has some trouble. Besides, it will not be so bad when Alec is made captain, and then I can go a voyage with him from time to time."

"And who is going to make him captain?" he said scornfully.

"They would make him now," she answered simply, "if only he had money to buy a fifth share in the *Princess Mary*."

Instantly his face changed, and there was a savage gleam from under the bushy eyebrows.

"Ay, ay, there again—it's money he's after, as well I kenned," he said between his teeth. "Money to buy a fifth share in the *Princess Mary!* Well, well, what's going to be will be."

Apparently he was trying to conceal his anger. He remained silent for some little while, busying himself with his supper. Then he said, in quite a conciliatory way:

"Ailie, lass, do ye think they could light a fire for me in the safe-room?"—for so he had chosen to designate the room in which he had placed the iron chest.

"Oh, yes!" said she, "it's many a day since there was a fire in that room, but I dare say the chimney will draw well enough."

"As soon as ye've finished, then, just bid the lasses light a fire there," said he—"ay, and a good blazing fire; for I have papers and things to burn."

"Very well, uncle," she said; and, as she had just then finished supper, she went away to do as she was bid.

It did not occur to him as unnecessarily and wantonly cruel to ask a young girl to go and get ready a fire for the slow burning of her lover's effigy; his thoughts were elsewhere; he was trying to guess where Alec Jameson might be at this moment, now that this fell disease was about to strike at his vitals. In a public-house making merry? Or on board the *Princess Mary*, wondering when he was to become captain? Or perhaps deciding as to which of the lawyers he would go to on the following day? Anyhow, for him, and his mischief-making, and his insolent designs, there had come an end.

It was Alison herself who came to announce that the fire was lit and burning well. He went away and got a pair of iron pincers; then he

sought out the little chamber, and shut himself in, locking the door behind him. Outside the world was growing white with the moonlight, the sea was distinctly visible, and the far and dusky line of coast under the clear, still heavens; and so, for some reason or another, he went to the window and closed the shutters and barred them. Then he lit the solitary candle that was standing on the mantelshelf. After a hard struggle he managed to open the big iron chest. He took therefrom the little box he had deposited there for safety in the afternoon; and presently the wax effigy was in the firm grip of the pincers. He went to the fire. The flames were burning merrily now. And then, after a moment's hesitation, he thrust the wax in front of the hot red glow.

All this he had done as one in a dream. It was not of these mechanical appliances he was thinking; it was of the effect of this incantation, as it would now be happening many a mile away. Had the pain begun? Or was it only a feverish heat he felt as yet, and a sickness? And were the maleficent spirits at work—hovering over the house where he was, and chuckling, maybe, and laughing over their devilish trade? Did

the old woman know what was going on? Perhaps she could help? He had left her in a friendly mood; she had everything to hope for; thwarting him would not serve her turn; aiding him would be to her own advantage. And Alison would still remain at Fasslie; and the money, and bonds, and railway shares, would be untouched and his own; and no longer would the nights be full of fears as to what the lawyers in Inverness might do.

But this wax image seemed hard and cold and impenetrable. It did not seem to melt. And was the fire not yet beginning to pierce him? Perhaps the favouring unseen powers and influences were waiting—were impatient—might go away? And so he held the effigy closer and closer to the bars, until it almost touched the coals. A drop fell—and another—and another—and he began to tremble and his head to swim, for that they looked so like blood. And then, in a half-dazed way, he rather withdrew the wax from the heat. The melting was to be done thrice; too fierce and sudden a sickness, killing a man at once, might provoke suspicion. And so he withdrew the image somewhat, suffering it to harden again, and yet gradually.

No matter if it were hardened quite and cold; the pain had struck; the disease would work now; his enemy was disposed of.

And yet he was not altogether satisfied. Why should a few minutes' torture imperil a man's life? Perhaps he had been too hasty in withdrawing the image from the fire? And then, again, although the wise woman had instructed him to pierce the wax with needles on the second day of the melting, what harm could there be in putting in one now, just to make assurance doubly sure? So he held the effigy to the flames again, but not too near, until the wax grew soft; and then, under his breath, and with a malignant emphasis that showed how profoundly he believed in the baleful efficacy of the charm, he repeated the words—

> "Fire burn, fire stew,
> This first knife I stick in you,"

and drove the point of the needle into the upper part of the image, about where the heart of a man would be. A further drop or two of the wax fell on the hearthstone—more like blood than ever, as it appeared to him. But he was satisfied now. The mischief was begun. His

unknown friends could not complain of any want of thoroughness on his part.

When he had replaced the now shrunken image in the box, and placed that again in the iron chest, and locked the same, he blew out the candle, and made his way back to the parlour. Here he found Alison and the servant lasses assembled for family worship, that being the custom of the house; and there was the big chair drawn in to the table, and the family Bible lying open. His first duty was to read a chapter, and he began to do so at once, but in a mechanical fashion, for he could not keep his thoughts from going back to the little chamber, and the red fire, and the needle, and the drops falling like blood on the hearthstone. This was the 23d Chapter of the Book of Numbers he was reading; and he had come upon it quite fortuitously; for the practice of the house was to go steadily through the Bible, from end to end, one chapter a night. And yet as he read of Balak the King of Moab, who would have a curse fall upon Israel, and how Balaam was constrained to bless the people, his mind was haunted with misgivings; and then came the verse: "Surely there is no enchantment against

Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" But the mechanical reading came to an end; then he gave out the psalm

"They in the Lord that firmly trust
Shall be like Sion hill,
Which at no time can be removed
But standeth ever still.
As round about Jerusalem
The mountains stand alway,
The Lord his folk doth compass so,
From henceforth and for aye"—

and they sang that to the plaintive tune of "Martyrdom," Alison leading; and then Alison and the girls went, and he was left alone.

There was something disquieting in that chapter, however perfunctorily he had read out the verses; and now, as he sate in the big arm-chair, plunged in a profound reverie, he tried to recall them. And what was it that had caused the curse of Balaam to fail? What had changed it into a blessing? Surely the fact that the children of Israel were under the special protection of the Almighty, who had interfered with the ordinary course of nature on their behalf.

"And it was long ago," he continued to reason with himself, in these half disconnected musings, "and it was in another part of the world altogether. But, long ago as it was, long before that there were the other powers, in the glens and among the hills and by the lochs, and who has put them away? Before ever the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt the kelpies were in every water in Scotland; and the underground people in every lonely mound and hillock; and spirits in every wood and glen, and on every wide untenanted moor: who can think that they have all been destroyed? Balaam's curse was turned into a blessing—but that was in another land, and the Lord was working miracles from day to day on behalf of a particular people. But that was all over now; and here in Scotland the mysterious powers that dwelt in earth and air and water were allowed to work their will, as thousands upon thousands of stories testified. And who was Alec Jameson, that any interference should be made on his behalf? A common sailor, that might lose his life to-morrow or next day by stumbling over the edge of a quay, or falling down a stair, and the world pay no heed at all. No, no; there

could be no interference in his case. There were reasons for miracles in former days, when there was a whole nation to save; but this was merely a sailor lad in Inverness; who was to interfere to save him? And already the fire was kindled —the consuming fire—that was to eat through him, and wither him, and destroy him for ever."

That night old Robert Graham could not sleep: when he dozed off for a few minutes, appalling visions presented themselves to him, and he would awake with a cry of terror, gazing wildly at the door of his room, as if expecting strange figures to stalk in. At last he got up and lit a candle and tried to read; and then he would walk up and down the room for another half-hour, thinking mostly of Inverness and of what might be happening there in the dead of night; and finally, when the first gray light of the dawn appeared, he completed his dressing, and was right glad to get out into the actual world, though it was as yet all voiceless and untenanted and spectral.

During that day he was quite anxiously civil towards his niece; though he did not notice that she, on her part, was disturbed and restless, and

absent from time to time for a considerable period.

"Ailie, lass," said he, at their mid-day dinner, "I'm thinking of taking a trip to Edinburgh in a week or two's time."

"Yes, uncle?"

"Would ye like to go wi' me?" he said, but he kept his eyes down, for this was not a natural part for him to play.

"Me, uncle?" she said, in great surprise.

"Both of us have as hard work as most folk," he said, "what wi' the farm and the house; and we're no so ill off; though it's a lot o' money to spend on the railway. But ye've often said ye would like to see Edinburgh; and a lass come to your time o' life shouldna have it to say that she ne'er saw a town bigger than Inverness; and I'm thinking we'll just have a bit holiday trip together, if ye're willing. Your mind has been set on other things, as weel I ken; but a young lass's fancies alter and alter as the days pass; and I dare say ye'll be as well pleased to see Edinburgh as anybody. And we'll no spend so much money, after a'; for we'll go to some quiet, clean, comfortable bit inn or lodging-house about the Cowgate; and for the sight-seeing—for ye maun

see the Castle and the Calton Hill and Holyrood, and a mony things like that—weel, we'll just do it on foot, as heaps o' better folk have to do. Ay, ay, lass, your mind will hae plenty to think o' when ye climb up Arthur's Seat and see the big town lying below ye. It's a fine sight, that. I've heard folk say there's not a finer in the three kingdoms."

Alison Graham could not at all understand this unwonted complaisance on the part of her uncle; but she said little; she seemed preoccupied. And but that he, too, was busy with his own affairs, he might have complained of her repeated absences from the house in the afternoon. But he did not notice. He was looking forward to the evening, and the renewal of the torture. What was happening in Inverness? The pining and wasting had lasted now nearly twenty-four hours; soon there would come the occasion for the driving in of those vengeful knives.

Just before supper he thought he would steal into the safe-room for a minute and see how the corpse-like image looked after the melting of the previous night. He had not ordered the fire to be lit as yet; and as he had left the window barred, he took a match with him in order

to light the candle. He approached the door silently and stealthily, as if there were a coffin in the room.

His fingers trembled as they groped for the handle of the door, though he could scarce have told why; what was there to harm in a piece of moulded wax? Inside, the little chamber was quite dark. He felt for the head of the match. And then—over there at the window-recess—he saw something white. His eyes were fascinated; he went forward; it was something wavering, blue-white, and spectral in the darkness; was it on the lid of the iron chest? A kind of wave of shadow passed over it, and it partly disappeared; the next moment it shone out with an appalling distinctness—the likeness of a gallows in gleaming white fire. Terror-stricken, speechless, with palsied hands and frenzied eyeballs, he stood and glared at this awful thing; and then three shrieks—three shrill, sharp shrieks, uttered in rapid succession—rang through the silent house, and the old man fell helpless and senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER V.

THE BRIDE'S DOWRY.

When those three shrill screams rang through the house, Alison Graham, who was seated alone in the parlour—but apparently not very intent on the work that lay in her lap—threw her sewing aside, and went swiftly up the stair. When she reached the landing, the dim moonlight in the passage showed her that the door of a small store-room there was just being opened; and she knew that the dark figure issuing from it must be Alec Jameson. She caught him by the arm.

"Oh, Alec, what has happened?" she said, in a frighted whisper. "What is it? What has happened?"

"Get a light, and see," he answered hurriedly, but in an undertone. "Maybe your uncle has had a fit. I'm going down to the shore; I'll wait for you there."

He disappeared. She had to return to the parlour for a candle; but her mind was so bewildered by wild forebodings that she seemed as one dazed, and she could scarce light the candle for the shaking of her hand. Had the two men met? Had a murder been done in the house? Was there some ghastly object lying there in the safe-room? And yet Jameson had declared to her that his first object was to keep out of the way of her uncle; and had made the most elaborate precautions for concealing himself in the store-closet. However, she could not reason about it. The three piercing shrieks were a summons. Whatever sight might be awaiting her, to that dreaded safe-room she must go.

She went quickly up the stair again, and had just reached the door when she fancied she heard a stirring within. For a moment she paused, as if to summon her courage together; then she boldly opened the door and entered: the next instant she had uttered a sharp cry of alarm.

"Uncle—what is it?"

The old man was struggling to his feet—white-faced, with staring eyes and apparently speechless. He seized her by the hand, and clung to her; then he darted a brief, terrified

glance back towards the iron chest in the recess; there was nothing of an unusual kind visible there.

"Ailie—Ailie, lass," said he, at length—and she felt that he was trembling like a reed, and was, indeed, like to fall to the floor again—"dinna leave me—just bide here for a minute or two—I've had a kind o' wakeness come o'er me—but I'll be all right in a minute."

He stopped for want of breath.

"I'll go and fetch you something, uncle," said she. "Some brandy——"

"Ay, ay, brandy—brandy," he managed to stammer out.

"Then sit down for a moment, uncle, and I'll bring it. Here, let me get you the chair."

"No, no, dinna leave me, Ailie, lass—no, no—wait a minute and I'll gang wi' ye—ay, now—help me a bit—we'll get down to the parlour—there, now—that's a good lass."

She gave him what help she could, while she held the candle aloft with her other hand; and in this way they got down to the parlour, where he sank helplessly into an arm-chair.

"The brandy, now, Ailie,—it's a kind o' wakeness that came o'er me—there's a good lass."

For she had quickly gone to the cupboard, and poured some brandy into a tumbler, and brought it to him. With a shaking hand he managed to raise it to his lips and take a gulp of it: at the same moment there was a noise without in the passage—a servant lass was bringing along the things for supper.

"No, no," he said, and he held up his hand as if to forbid her entrance. "Go and tell her, Ailie, not to come in here—not yet—later on."

Alison went to explain to the girl that her uncle was not yet ready for his supper; and while she was gone he kept muttering to himself—

"They're against me—they're against me—and the wise woman spoke of a gallows, too—what has angered them?—but there's an end of that now."

Alison returned; and though she had no great cause to testify solicitude about her uncle—whose treatment of her had been of the harshest—still, he was in need of help and care, and womanlike she busied herself about him, and got a pillow for his head, and made a hundred little suggestions for his comfort.

"I've been an ill man, Ailie," he said—though it almost seemed to her that he was talking to himself, so absent were his eyes. "I've done wrong and harm; but surely the worst sinner will find mercy and peace if he repents. There's aye that. Seek and ye shall find. The door is aye open. The Lord is merciful—ay, even to the worst. Ailie, lass, bring over the big Bible to the table, and read me the Twenty-third Psalm—there's a good lass."

"But will I not send for the doctor, uncle?" she said quickly; for this calling for religious consolation startled her.

"No, no; there's the doctor I want—peace and mercy—peace and grace—the door's aye open."

So she went and got the Bible; and laid it on the table; and proceeded to read the psalm that he wanted. And as she read, he followed her—apparently repeating phrases from time to time, with little comments of his own:

"*The Lord is my shepherd*—ay, that's right, the Lord can save: what for would any one go away from Him? . . . *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*—no terrors—no terrors now—I would be on the safe

side—on the Lord's side—and then who can harm? . . . *Thou preparest a table for me*—ay, indeed, it's the Lord's side that's the safe side—no harm can come then—safety only, and peace, and a quate mind. . . . *I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*—ay, that's right—I'm obliged to ye, Ailie, lass—ye may shut the book now—in the house of the Lord for ever—that's where there's safety—that's the safe side—in the house of the Lord for ever."

When she had shut the big Bible and put it back in its place, she returned to him, anxious to do what she could for him; and indeed those mumbled remarks had caused her some concern, for they sounded like the utterances of one whose mind had been unhinged. And yet her uncle was evidently recovering his ordinary look; and not only that, but he had some thought to bestow upon her. He would have her call to the servant to bring supper now; and it was not for himself, it was for her; why should she be kept hungry, merely because a weakness had come over him, and he had sunk fainting to the floor for a minute or two? Nay, he insisted. Alison, who was far more solicitous about him than he had any right to expect,

would have dismissed all notions about supper, but that he would not be denied; so the girl was summoned, and the table laid. During that time the old farmer remained profoundly silent and thoughtful; when the girl had gone, he spoke:

"Ailie, lass," said he, in a low voice—as if he feared some one might be listening without—"tell me, now, do ye happen to be aware o' Alec Jameson's address in Inverness?"

She was startled, and looked at him, as if to find out what he meant by such a question; but his eyes were bent on the floor.

"Yes, uncle," she answered.

"Well, now, lass," he said, but still not regarding her, "after ye've finished wi' your supper, ye'll jist sit down and write him a bit note, bidding him to come through to Fasslie. It's a bad thing to have quarrelling—a bad thing; it's better to be friendly; and you jist tell him that if he'll come through here, we'll see if something cannot be done to put us all on friendly terms. Ay, ay; and just in case he should have gone to Nairn, to see his mother, send him a bit note there too: it's all the one writing, and no great trouble."

"Indeed, uncle, it's not any trouble I would spare to bring you and him together," she said, but she was entirely bewildered; she could not understand this sudden change of front—nor yet the singular events of that evening.

"Ay, and if he is not well enough to come," the old man continued cautiously; "if anything is the matter wi' him and he canna come through to Fasslie, then ye'll just tell him that we would like to make friends all the same, and he is to look forward to that when he gets better, and that there's none wish him sooner well again than the folk at Fasslie."

"But he's not ill at all, uncle," Alison exclaimed.

"How ken ye that?" said he quickly.

"Because——" said she, and then she stopped and stammered, and it was well that he did not notice her confusion. "Because—he would have let me know—oh, I am sure he is not ill at all—I am sure of that."

The old man relapsed into silence; and she went on with her supper. When she had finished she asked him whether she should summon the lasses for family worship, or whether he would not omit that on this evening,

seeing that he was not so well. But the old farmer would not hear of any such omission; the girls came in; the big Bible was opened; and he began the reading.

It was the twenty-fourth chapter of the book of Numbers he had to read; and he seemed singularly distraught and absent as he began, "And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness." Nay, now and again he would stop and repeat a phrase as if pondering over the application of it to his own case; and especially he did so when he came to "Blessed is he that blesseth thee." Alison could not but observe that her uncle was very strange in his manner; and more than ever was she bewildered as to what had happened during the evening; but she knew that an explanation would soon be forthcoming, as soon as she could slip away from the house and seek out her lover, who was waiting for her down by the shore.

That opportunity arrived directly; for when family worship was over her uncle bade her go away and write the two letters, charging her to make them as friendly as possible. Instead of

going to her own little room, she merely drew a shawl round her head and shoulders, opened the front door quietly, and stole out into the night.

The sea was much quieter now than it had been during the past few days, though still a murmurous noise told of the regular fall and recoil of the waves; and if the moonlight was scarcely so strong as it had been, it was still clear enough to lighten up this solitary world of shore and water and solemn overarching sky. She walked quickly; she could hear even her light footfall in the prevailing silence that the monotonous wash of the waves hardly seemed to break. But by and by she was nearer down to the sea; then she began to look around her; she heard her name whispered; the next moment she was in a sheltered nook among the rocks, with her sweetheart's arms enfolding her.

"Oh, Alec, tell me what it is all about—it is all so strange—so strange," she said, as she freed herself from the encumbering shawl, so that she could nestle closer to him. "Do you know that my uncle thinks you have been ill?"

"It's no fault of his that I am not," said he, grimly.

"Oh, but you must not speak like that any more," said she, earnestly. "It is to be all different now. He is most anxious to be friends with you."

"What—already?"

"At this very moment he thinks I am writing to you, bidding you come to Fasslie, and there's to be no more quarrelling, but everything friendly and well. And what has made the change, Alec; what has happened? Tell me quick, dear, for I must get back to my uncle."

"Is he ill after the fright?" the young sailor asked, and there was a curious smile on his face.

"Not so ill as he was—oh no; we had the family worship just as usual. But he has been greatly disturbed—maybe the fainting fit frightened him. Now, tell me, Alec, what you wanted to be in the house for."

"But it's a long story, Ailie, my dear——"

"He'll no miss me for a while," said she, "for I had two letters to write, and he was anxious they should be very very friendly, and bring you to Fasslie just at once."

He laughed.

"That's a change in the weather," said he.

"However, I'll tell ye how it all came about. Your uncle has been trying to murder me."

"Alec!" she exclaimed, and she tried to withdraw herself from him.

"Oh, but it's true, Ailie, darling," said he coolly. "First he thought to fell me, but I bid him beware of what would happen; then he brought out a horsewhip, but I broke that; then he spoke about the collies, but what was the use of that when you were by me; and so, as he couldna get at me any other way, what more natural than that he should try if a witch could help him? Ailie, my dear, your uncle's a queer man; surely he was born and brought up in Shetland. Why, there's not an ignorant servant lass nor a half-witted sailor has such a faith in magic and witchcraft, if all I hear be true. Ay, and it is true; and what has happened this night is a proof o't. Would you believe it, then—your uncle went in to Inverness to get hold of some witch or spey-wife there that would work a mischief on me; and as good luck would have it, he happened on two poor old bodies called Lissom, that get a sixpence or a shilling now and again by telling fortunes. I'm told that it's only of late years

they've taken to such tricks; when my mother knew them in Nairn they were respectable hard-working folk just like others; but they grew old, and got less work, and I suppose the temptation of picking up a little money easily in that way was too much for them; so that now when a sailor-lad wants to know if his lass will bide true to him, he just slips round to the wise women, and they bid him look through a piece of crystal or some nonsense of that kind, and then he comes on board with a light heart. Ay, and that old Nancy Lissom is a sharp one; she led your uncle on from one thing to another, and got hold of the whole story; and all the time she was saying to herself, 'This will be news for Mrs. Jameson, and perhaps her laddie will gain by it.' As for her," the young sailor continued with a laugh, "five pounds was what she got—and a mighty windfall it was for them, I'm thinking—but they were to get ever so much more as soon as they managed to kill me, so I'm much obliged to them for staying their hand."

"But what do you mean, Alec—kill you?" the girl exclaimed.

"Why, she pretended she could waste me

with a sickness by melting a wax image before a fire; and she gave your uncle the image, and told him what to do, and last night he was to begin."

Alison uttered a little cry. There flashed into her memory the lighting of the fire on the previous evening. Could this terrible tale be true; had her uncle really been plotting against the life of her lover?

"Ay, she is a sharp one, that old Nancy Lissom," he continued, in his matter-of-fact way "The very first thing next morning she sent her sister to my mother to find out where I was; and then I went back with her; and between them they made out a fine plan; at least, I'm thinking it has worked very well so far, Ailie; and I think that neither you nor me will ever have a word to say against spey-wives as long as we live. I need not tell you how it was all arranged, for ye must be getting back to the house; if your uncle found out I was in the neighbourhood, he might suspect; but this I will tell you, that when he went into the safe-room this evening he saw something he will not forget in a hurry; there was a gallows painted in white fire on the lid of the iron chest. Was

not that a good warning? Faith, it was a narrow squeak for me; for I had just time to bolt into the store-closet when I heard his foot on the stair; ay, and no sooner was I in than the phosphorus bottle fell from my hand, and I thought he would have heard the rattle of it, but I suppose he did not. And so he wants to be friends wi' me? Well, I'm willing to let bygones be bygones. When I said to old Nancy Lissom, 'But if I put that phosphorus gallows on the iron chest, I may frighten the old man out of his senses,' she says directly, 'Well, then, he would have murdered you if he could.' So it's quits, as far as I am minded. Now, Ailie, dear, I would like to stand here talking to you the whole night through; but we must not run any risk. He must not know I am here——"

"But you will stay on at the keeper's cottage, Alec," she said, "until there's time for the letters to go to Inverness, and for you to come back. Of course you will do that when he is so anxious to see you. And to-morrow forenoon, about eleven, be at the corner of the fir-plantation, and I will come and tell you how things are going. Good-night—good-night!"

They parted; and she hastened back to the

house. She found that the old farmer had not noticed her absence; he had drawn the armchair in to the table, and was poring over the family Bible, occasionally repeating a verse aloud—"*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. . . . The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts. . . . I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.*" And when he ceased, he told Alison that, on reflection, his conscience would not allow him to touch the little keg of smuggled whisky that had been secretly sent him from the "black bothy" (it was really a bribe; for the whereabouts of the illicit still was well known to the shepherds), but that if it was presented to Mr. MacInroy (the minister of the parish), there would be a kind of sanctifying it to good uses; consequently, he bade Alison see that the little cask was despatched to the manse on the following morning, with a message of compliments; for Mr. MacInroy was a good man, and respected, and it behoved all decent people to do what they could for the comfort and well-being of a minister of the gospel. After that, he counselled Alison to be a good girl; and said that peace and prosperity came to

those who walked in straight and upright ways; and then, after she had persuaded him to have a little supper, and also (without any persuasion) a stiff tumbler of whisky and water, he again recommended her to walk in the paths of mercy and justice and loving-kindness to all mankind, and got him away to bed.

Well, when sufficient time had been allowed to elapse for the arrival of the letters in Inverness and Nairn, and for the return of the proper answer, Alec Jameson made his appearance; and very much surprised he appeared to be at the summons, but humble, and civil, and courteous withal. After one sharp, brief glance, the old man rather kept his eyes away from him; but that single glance had satisfied the farmer that no mischief at all had been wrought by the charm. Had the unseen powers been mocking him, then? Or luring him on to his doom? Anyway, that was all over; he would keep to the straight path; whatever amends had to be made, he would make now; and then, with his hands washed clean of Alison's affairs, how could any one in the future harm him, above ground or under ground, in the water, or above the sky?

Alison, her uncle, and Alec Jameson were in the parlour.

"It's but a natural thing for young folk to think of getting married," said the farmer, "and I've changed my mind; I'll no stand in your way any longer. And then there's another thing: when Alison leaves the farm, she maun take wi' her her share; that's but right; I want to be just and fair to every one, man or woman, old or young. It's no for me to say how much it is; for I've worked hard, for her sake and my own; but we'll have the lawyers draw out an account, and whatever is hers, she'll have. Are ye satisfied?"

He looked up at the young man.

"It was not after Alison's money that I ever came to Fasslie," Alec Jameson said.

"But are ye satisfied?"

"I would take Alison without a penny, if that was her condition," he said.

"But are ye satisfied?" the old man insisted.

"Oh yes. On behalf of Alison, I cannot but say that is a fair offer."

"For this is what I want to say," the old farmer continued, "that when Ailie has got every penny that is strictly hers; weel, then, a

young lass should hae a little bit extra to spend on hersel' when she's going to get married, and over and above what the lawyers give her, I mysel' will give her fifty pounds—fifty pounds will I give her. For what? Just to show that there's nae ill-feeling between me and her, or the man she's going to marry, or any other human crayture."

Of course they professed themselves profoundly grateful; it was none of their business to probe the deeps of human motives—though they may have had a little bit of a guess as to the origin of this unwonted generosity; besides, the fifty pounds would do something to beautify the little cottage just outside Inverness that these two had talked of from time to time, with but scant notion that it was to be so soon in their possession.

And a very pretty cottage it is, too, at this moment; and if you happen to be driving by, you may catch a glimpse of Alison Graham—or rather, Mrs. Jameson, for such has been her state and condition these three or four years or more—at work trimming and pruning in the back garden, while a small bullet-headed boy is tumbling about near her among the gooseberry

bushes, and doing what mischief his tiny fists can. The fifty pounds were carefully expended; but as for the other money coming to Alison, that has not been touched; on the contrary, it has been added to, for Captain Jameson's fifth share has so far been profitable. Alison has gone one or two voyages in the *Princess Mary;* but she is not particularly fond of it; with two children to look after, the time does not hang heavily on her hands. She has her holiday-time when Alec Jameson comes home from sea; and they have plenty of friends in Inverness; though she has not yet mustered up courage enough to accept her husband's jocular invitation that she should go and see the two wise women. She prefers to leave them alone.

As for old Robert Graham, he is an elder now. The shrunken wax effigy he buried at cock-crow on a Sabbath morning, when, as every one knows, charms and incantations are powerless to harm; the rest of the day he devoted to reading aloud from the family Bible. Whether the mysterious and unnamed powers are still unfriendly, or are content to let bygones be bygones, he cannot judge; at all events, he would cherish no ill-will against them; perhaps

they only resented some touch of green being left on the big iron chest. But he never goes into the safe-room now after the sun has sunk behind the western hills.

RHYMES BY A DEERSTALKER.

(Reprinted chiefly from the Novel entitled "White Heather.")

Roses white, roses red,
  Roses in the lane,
Tell me, roses red and white,
  Where is Meenie gane?

O is she on Loch Loyal's side?
  Or up by Mudal Water?
In vain the wild doves in the woods
  Everywhere have sought her.

Roses white, roses red,
  Roses in the lane,
Tell me, roses red and white,
  Where is Meenie gane?

Ben Loyal spake to Ben Clebrig,
And they thundered their note of war:
"You look down on your sheep and your sheepfolds:
I see the ocean afar.

"You look down on the huts and the hamlets
And the trivial tasks of men:
I see the great ships sailing
Along the northern main."

Ben Clebrig laughed, and the laughter
Shook heaven and earth and sea:
"There is something in that small hamlet
That is fair enough for me—

"Ay, fairer than all your sailing ships
Touched with the morning flame—
A fresh young flower from the hand of God
Rose Meenie is her name!"

O WILT thou be my dear love?
(Meenie and Meenie),
O wilt thou be my ain love?
(My sweet Meenie).
Were you wi' me upon the hill,
It's I would gar the dogs be still,
We'd lie our lone and kiss our fill
(My love Meenie).

Aboon the burn a wild bush grows
(Meenie and Meenie),
And on the bush there blooms a rose
(My sweet Meenie),
And wad ye tak' the rose frae me,
And wear it where it fain would be,
It's to your arms that I would flee
(Rose-sweet Meenie!).

Ben Clebrig's a blaze of splendour
In the first red flush of the morn,
And his gaze is fixed on the eastward
To greet the day new-born;
And he listens a-still for the bellow
Of the antlered stag afar,
And he laughs at the royal challenge,
The hoarse, harsh challenge of war.

But Ben Clebrig is gentle and placid
When the sun sinks into the west,
And a mild and a mellow radiance
Shines on his giant crest;
For he's looking down upon Meenie,
As she wanders along the road,
And the mountain bestows his blessing
On the fairest child of God.

A BALLAD

THE kirkyard mould is on my head;
But a fire is in my heart;
O Mary Mother, have pity on me,
And let my soul depart!

O is she dead, or does she live,
That wrought this woe on me,
That neither Heaven nor Hell is mine,
But in the dark I dree?

Yestreen I thought I heard her step,
A flame went through my breast:
"O is she come to say the word
Will let my soul have rest?"

But never she thinks of Girvan's banks,
And never of Afton's bowers;
Nor of the nights her heart beat wild
Till the wan morning hours.

But ever her eyes are angry red,
And her cheeks are white and white:
God's Mother, I pray you pardon me,
And let my soul take flight!

It's Heaven or Hell that I would seek,
If my false love be not there—
My false love that did murder me
On the bonny banks of Ayr.

ADAM O' FINTRY.

"O MOTHER, mother, steik the door,
And hap me in my bed:
O what is the ringing in that kirk-tower?"
"It's Adam o' Fintry's wed."

"It's Adam o' Fintry was my love
When the spring was on the lea;
It's Adam o' Fintry was my love
When the leaf fell frae the tree.

"O mother, mother, steik the door,
And make the window fast;
And wrap the sheet around my een
Till a' the folk be past.

"And smiles he on the bonny bride?
And is she jimp and fair?
And make they for the castle-towers
Upon the banks of Ayr?

"O what is this, mother, I hear?—
The bell goes slower and slow;
And are they making ready now
For the dark way I maun go?

"You'll lay me out upon the bed,
In a fair white linen sheet;
With candles burning at my heid,
And at my cauld, cauld feet;

"But, mother, bid them ring low and low
Upon the morrow's morn;
For I wouldna that Fintry heard the bell
When to the kirk I'm borne."

MUDAL IN JUNE.

MUDAL, that comes from the lonely mere,
Silent or whispering, vanishing ever,
Know you of aught that concerns us here?—
You, youngest of all God's creatures, a river.

Born of a yesterday's summer shower,
And hurrying on with your restless motion,
Silent or whispering, every hour,
To lose yourself in the great lone ocean.

Your banks remain; but you go by,
Through day and through darkness swiftly sailing:
Say, do you hear the curlew cry,
And the snipe in the night-time hoarsely wailing?

Do you watch the wandering hinds in the morn;
Do you hear the grouse-cock crow in the heather;
Do you see the lark spring up from the corn,
All in the radiant summer weather?

O Mudal stream, how little you know,
That Meenie has loved you and loves you ever;
And while to your ocean home you flow,
She says good-bye to her well-loved river!

O see you her now—she is coming a-nigh—
And the flower in her hand her aim discloses:
Laugh, Mudal, your thanks as you're hurrying by—
For she flings you a rose in the month of roses!

BY ISLAY'S SHORES.

By Islay's shores she sate and sang:
"O winds come blowing o'er the sea,
And bring me back my love again
That went to fight in Germanie!"

And all the live-long day she sang,
And nursed the bairn upon her knee:
"Balou, balou, my bonnie bairn,
Thy father's far in Germanie,

"But ere the summer days are gane,
And winter blackens bush and tree,
Thy father will we welcome hame
Frae the red wars in Germanie."

O dark the night fell, dark and mirk;
A wraith stood by her icily:
"Dear wife, I'll never more win hame,
For I am slain in Germanie.

"On Minden's field I'm lying stark,
And Heaven is now my far countrie;
Farewell, dear wife, farewell, farewell,
I'll ne'er win hame frae Germanie."

And all the year she came and went,
And wandered wild frae sea to sea:
"O neighbours, is he ne'er come back,
My love that went to Germanie?"

Port Ellen saw her many a time;
Round by Port Askaig wandered she:
"Where is the ship that's sailing in
With my dear love frae Germanie?'

But when the darkened winter fell:
"It's cold for baith my bairn and me;
Let me lie down and rest awhile:
My love's away frae Germanie.

"O far away and away he dwells;
High Heaven is now his fair countrie;
And there he stands—with arms outstretched—
To welcome hame my bairn and me!"

Mudal, that comes from the lonely loch,
Down through the moorland russet and brown,
Know you the news that we have for you?—
Meenie's away to Glasgow town.

See Ben Clebrig, his giant front
Hidden and dark with a sullen frown;
What is the light of the valley to him,
Since Meenie's away to Glasgow town?

Empty the valley, empty the world,
The sun may arise and the sun go down;
But what to do with the lonely hours,
Since Meenie's away to Glasgow town?

Call her back, Clebrig; Mudal, call!
Ere all of the young Spring-time be flown;
Birds, trees, and blossoms—you that she loved—
O summon her back from Glasgow town!

O Glasgow town, how little you know
That Meenie has wandered in
To the very heart of your darkened streets
Through all the bustle and din.

A Sutherland blossom shining fair
Amid all your dismal haze,
Forgetting the breath of the summer hills,
And the blue of the northern days.

From Dixon's fire-wreaths to Rollox stalk,
Blow, south wind, and clear the sky,
Till she think of Ben Clebrig's sunny slopes
Where the basking red-deer lie.

Blow, south wind, and show her a glimpse of blue
Through the pall of dusky brown;
And see that you guard her and tend her well,
You, fortunate Glasgow town!

THE clouds lay heavy on Clebrig's crest,
For days and weeks together;
The shepherds along Strath-Terry's side
Cursed at the rainy weather;
They scarce could get a favouring day
For the burning of the heather.

When sudden the clouds were rent in twain
And the hill laughed out to the sun;
And the hinds stole up, with wondering eyes,
To the far slopes yellow and dun;
And the birds were singing in every bush,
As at spring anew begun.

O Clebrig, what is it that makes you glad,
And whither is gone your frown?
Are you looking afar into the south,
The long wide strath adown?
And see you that Meenie is coming back—
Love Meenie, from Glasgow town?

O LASSES, lasses, gang your ways,
And dust the house, or wash the claes;
Ye put me in a kind o' blaze—
Ye'll break my heart among ye.

At kirk or market, morn or e'en,
The like o' them was never seen,
For each is kind, and each a queen;
Ye'll break my heart among ye.

There's that one dark, and that one fair,
And yon has wealth o' yellow hair;
Gang hame, gang hame—I can nae mair:
Ye'll break my heart among ye.

TO HIS TERRIER.

AULD, gray, and grizzled; yellow een;
A nose as brown's a berry;
A wit as sharp as ony preen—
That's my wee chieftain Harry.

Lord sakes!—the courage o' the man!
The biggest barn-yard ratten,
He'll snip him by the neck, o'er-han',
As he the deil had gatten.

And when his master's work on hand,
There's none maun come anear him;
The biggest Duke in all Scotland,
My Harry's teeth would fear him.

But ordinar' wise-like fowl or freen,
He's harmless as a kitten;
As soon he'd think o' worryin'
A hennie when she's sittin'.

But Harry, lad, ye're growin' auld;
Your days are getting fewer;
And maybe Heaven has made a fauld
For such wee things as you are.

And what strange kintra will that be?
And will they fill your coggies?
And whatna strange folk there will see
There's water for the doggies?

Ae thing I brawly ken: it's this—
Ye may hae work or play there;
But if your master once ye miss,
I'm bound ye winna stay there.

A LETTER.

O JOHNNIE, leave the lass alane;
Her mother has but that one wean;
For a' the others have been ta'en,
As weel ye ken, Johnnie.

'Tis true her bonnie een would rive
The heart o' any man alive;
And in the husry she would thrive,
I grant ye that, Johnnie.

But wad ye tak' awa' the lass,
I tell ye what would come to pass,
The mother soon wad hae the grass
Boon her auld head, Johnnie.

They've got a cow, and bit o' land
That well would bear another hand;
Come down frae Tongue, and take your stand
On Kinloch's side, Johnnie!

Ye'd herd a bit, and work the farm,
And keep the widow-wife frae harm;
And wha would keep ye snug and warm
In winter-time, Johnnie?—

The lass hersel'—that I'll be sworn!
And bonnier creature ne'er was born;
Come down the strath the morrow's morn,
Your best foot first, Johnnie!

ACROSS THE SEA.

In Nova Scotia's clime they've met,
To keep the New Year's night;
The merry lads and lasses crowd
Around the blazing light.

But father and mother sit withdrawn
To let their fancies flee
To the old, old time, and the old, old home
That's far across the sea.

And what strange sights and scenes are these
That sadden their shaded eyes?—
Is it only thus they can see again
The land of the Mackays?

O there the red-deer roam at will;
And the grouse whirr on the wing;
And the curlew call, and the ptarmigan
Drink at the mountain spring;

And the hares lie snug on the hillside;
And the lusty black-cock crows;
But the river the children used to love
Through an empty valley flows.

Do they see once more a young lad wait
To shelter with his plaid,
When she steals to him in the gathering dusk,
His gentle Highland maid?

Do they hear the pipes at the weddings;
Or the long, funereal wail
As the boat goes out to the island,
And the shrill notes tell their tale?

O fair is Naver's strath, and fair
The strath that Mudal laves;
And dear the haunts of our childhood,
And dear the old folks' graves;

And the parting from one's native land
Is a sorrow hard to dree;
God's forgiveness to them that drove us
So far across the sea!

And is bonnie Strath-Naver shining,
As it shone in the bygone years?—
As it shines for us now—ay, ever—
Though our eyes are blind with tears!

THROUGH the long sad centuries Clebrig slept,
Nor a sound the silence broke,
Till a morning in Spring a strange new thing
Bestirred him and he awoke;

And he laughed, and his joyous laugh was heard
From Erribol far to Tongue,
And his granite veins deep down were stirred,
And the great old mountain grew young.

'Twas Love Meenie he saw, and she walked by the shore,
And she sang so sweet and so clear,
That the sound of her voice made him see again
The dawn of the world appear.

And at night he spake to the listening stars,
And bade them a guard to keep
On the hamlet of Inver-Mudal there,
And the maid in her innocent sleep.

Till the years should go by, and they should see
Love Meenie take her stand
'Mong the maidens around the footstool of God,
She gentlest of all the band!

ALL on a fair May morning
The roses began to blow;
Some of them tipped with crimson,
Some of them tipped with snow.

But they looked the one to the other,
And they looked adown the glen;
They looked the one to the other
And rubbed their eyes again.

"O there is the lark in the heavens,
And the mavis sings in the tree;
And surely this is the summer,
But Meenie we cannot see.

"Surely there must be summer
Coming to this far clime;
And has Meenie, Love Meenie, forgotten,
Or have we mistaken the time?"

Then a foxglove spake to the roses:
"O hush you, and cease your din;
For I'm going back to my sleeping
Till Meenie brings summer in."

By Mudal's river she idly strayed;
And drank afresh the morning breeze:
Tell me, you beautiful dark-eyed maid
That's come across the Atlantic seas—

See you our winsome Sutherland flower,
Her cheek the tint of the summer rose,
Her gold-brown hair her only dower,
Her soul as white as Ben Clebrig's snows;

Blue as the ruffled loch her eyes,
Sweet her breath as the blossoming heather:
O do you think the whole world's skies
Can see aught fairer than you together?

Sisters twain—one slender and dark,
Her cheek faint-tanned by the tropic south;
One northern-bred, her voice like a lark,
The joy of the hills in her gladsome youth.

Ben Clebrig shall judge—nay, shall keep the two,
And bind them in chains of love for ever:
Look to it, Clebrig; guard them true:
Sisters twain—and why should they sever?

A FLOWER-AUCTION.

WHO will buy pansies?
  There are her eyes,
Dew-soft and tender,
  Love in them lies.

Who will buy roses?
  There are her lips,
And there is the nectar
  That Cupidon sips.

Who will buy lilies?
  There are her cheeks,
And there the shy blushing
  That maidhood bespeaks.

Meenie, Love Meenie,
  What must one pay?
Good stranger, the market's
  Not open to-day!

O WHITE's the moon upon the loch,
And black the bushes on the brae,
And red the light in your window-pane,
When will ye come away,
Meenie,
When will ye come away?

I'll wrap ye round and keep ye warm,
For mony a secret we've to tell,
And ne'er a sound will hinder us,
Down in yon hidden dell,
Meenie,
Down in yon hidden dell.

O see the moon is sailing on
Through fleecy clouds across the skies,
But fairer far the light that I know,
The love-light in your eyes,
Meenie,
The love-light in your eyes.

O haste and haste; the night is sweet,
But sweeter far what I would hear,
And I have a secret to tell to you,
A whisper in your ear,
Meenie,
A whisper in your ear.

SMALL birds in the corn
Are cowering and quailing:
O my lost love
Whence are you sailing?

Fierce the gale blows
Adown the bleak river;
The valley is empty
For ever and ever.

Out on the seas
The night-winds are wailing:
O my lost love
Whence are you sailing?

O Glasgow lasses are fair enough,
And Glasgow lads are merry;
But I would be with my own dear maid
A-wandering down Strath-Terry.

And she would be singing her morning song,
The song that the larks have taught her,
A song of the northern seas and hills,
And a song of Mudal Water.

The bands go thundering through the streets
The fifes and drums together;
Far rather I'd hear the grouse-cock crow
Among the purple heather;

And I would be on Ben Clebrig's brow
To watch the red-deer stealing
In single file adown the glen
And past the summer sheiling.

O Glasgow lasses are fair enough,
And Glasgow lads are merry;
But ah, for the voice of my own dear maid,
A-singing adown Strath-Terry!

REEL-SONG.

From out of the station we rattle away,
Wi' a clangour of axle and wheel;
There's a merrier sound that we know in the North—
The merry merry shriek of the reel.

O you that shouther the heavy iron gun,
And have steep, steep braes to speel—
We envy you not: enough is for us
The merry merry shriek of the reel.

When the twenty-four pounder leaps in the air
And the line flies out with a squeal—
O that is the blessedest sound upon earth,
The merry merry shriek of the reel.

So here's to good fellows! For them that are not
Let them gang and sup kail wi' the deil!
We've other work here—so look out, my lads,
For the first sharp shriek of the reel!

ANOTHER GLASS BEFORE WE GO.

Good friends and neighbours, life is short,
And man, they say, is made to mourn;
Dame Fortune makes us all her sport,
And laughs our very best to scorn.
Well, well: we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

The blue-eyed lass will change her mind,
And give her kisses otherwhere;
And she'll be cruel that was kind,
And pass you by with but a stare.
Well, well: we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

The silly laddie sits and fills
Wi' dreams and schemes the first o' life;
And then comes heap on heap of ills,
And squalling bairns and scolding wife.
Well, well: we'll have, if that be so,
A merry glass before we go.

Come stir the fire and make us warm,
The night without is dark and wet;
An hour or twa 'twill do nae harm
The dints o' fortune to forget.
So now we'll have, come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go.

To bonny lasses, honest blades,
We'll up and give a hearty cheer;
Contention is the worst of trades—
We drink their health, both far and near.
And so we'll have, come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go.

And here's ourselves!—no much to boast,
For man's a wean that lives and learns;
And some win hame and some are lost;
But still, we're all John Thomson's bairns.
So here, your hand!—come weal or woe,
Another glass before we go!

King Death came striding along the road,
And he laughed aloud to see
How every rich man's mother's son
Would take to his heels and flee.

Duke, lord, or merchant, off they skipped,
Whenever that he drew near;
And they dropped their guineas as wild they ran,
And their faces were white with fear.

But the poor folk labouring in the fields,
Watched him as he passed by;
And they took to their spades and mattocks again,
And turned to their work with a sigh.

Then farther along the road he saw
An old man sitting alone;
His head lay heavy upon his hands,
And sorrowful was his moan.

Old age had shrivelled and bent his frame;
Age and hard work together
Had scattered his locks, and bleared his eyes—
Age and the winter weather.

"Old man," said Death, "do you tremble to know
That now you are near the end?"
The old man looked: "You are Death," said he,
"And at last I've found a friend."

SHOUTHER TO SHOUTHER.

From Hudson's Bay to the Rio Grand'
The Scot is ever a rover;
In New South Wales and in Newfoundland,
And all the wide world over.

Chorus.

But it's shouther to shouther, my bonnie lads,
And let every Scot be a brither;
And we'll work as we can, and we'll win if we can,
For the sake of our auld Scotch mither.

She's a puir auld wife, wi' little to give,
And rather stint o' caressing;
But she's shown us how honest lives we may live,
And sent us out wi' her blessing.

Chorus—And it's shouther to shouther, etc.

Her land's no rich; and her crops are slim;
And I winna say much for the weather;
But she's given us legs that can gaily clim'
Up the slopes of the blossoming heather.

Chorus—And it's shouther to shouther, etc.

And she's given us hearts that, whate'er they say
(And I trow we might be better),
There's one sair fault they never will hae—
Our mither, we'll never forget her!

Chorus—And it's shouther to shouther, etc.

WINTER SONG.

KEEN blows the wind upon Clebrig's side,
And the snow lies thick on the heather,
And the shivering hinds are glad to hide
Away from the winter weather.

Chorus.

But soon the birds will begin to sing,
And we will sing too, my dear;
To give good welcoming to the Spring,
In the primrose-time o' the year!

Hark how the black lake, torn and tost,
Thunders along its shores;
And the burn is hard in the grip of the frost,
And white, snow-white are the moors.

Chorus.

But soon the birds will begin to sing,
And we will sing too, my dear;
To give good welcoming to the Spring,
In the primrose-time o' the year!

O then the warm west winds will blow,
And all in the sunny weather,
It's over the moorland we will go,
You and I, my love, together.

Chorus.

And then the birds will begin to sing,
And we will sing too, my dear,
To give good welcoming to the Spring,
In the primrose-time o' the year!

THE blossom was white on the blackthorn tree,
And the mavis was singing rarely;
When Meenie, Love Meenie, walk'd out wi' me,
All in the Spring-time early.

"Meenie, Love Meenie, your face let me see,
Meenie, come answer me fairly;
Meenie, Love Meenie, will you wed me,
All in the Spring-time early?"

Meenie but laughed; and kent na the pain
That shot through my heart fu' sairly:
"Kind sir, it's a maid that I would remain
All in the Spring-time early."

A MESSAGE.

THE hinds are feeding upon the hill,
And the hares on the fallow lea;
Awake, awake, Love Meenie!
Birds are singing in every tree;

And roses you'll find on your window-sill
To scent the morning air;
Awake, awake, Love Meenie,
For the world is shining fair!

O who is the mistress of bird and flower?
Ben Clebrig knows, I ween!
Awake, awake, Love Meenie,
To show them their mistress and queen!

O WHAT's the sweetest thing there is
In all the wide, wide world?
A rose that hides its deepest scent
In the petals closely curled?

Or the honey that's in the clover,
Or the lark's song in the morn,
Or the wind that blows in summer
Across the fields of corn;

Or the dew that the queen of the fairies
From her acorn-chalice sips?
Ah no; for sweeter and sweeter far
Is a kiss from Meenie's lips!

THE WITCH-MAIDENS.

THE moonlight lies on Loch Naver
And the night is strange and still;
And the stars are twinkling coldly
Above the Clebrig hill.

And there by the side of the water,
O what strange shapes are these?
O these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern seas.

And they stand in a magic circle,
Pale in the moonlight sheen;
And each has over her forehead
A star of golden-green.

O what is their song?—of sailors
That never again shall sail;
And the music sounds like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale.

But who is she who comes yonder?—
And all in white is she;
And her eyes are open, but nothing
Of the outward world can she see.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

They open the magic circle;
They draw her into the ring;
They kneel before her, and slowly
A strange, sad song they sing.

A strange, sad song—as of sailors
That never again shall sail;
And the music sounds like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

"O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
To our sea-halls draped with green;
O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
And be our rose-white queen!

"And you shall have robes of splendour,
With shells and pearls bestrewn;
And a sceptre olden and golden,
And a rose-white coral throne.

"And by day you will hear the music
Of the ocean come nigher and nigher;
And by night you will see your palace
Ablaze with phosphor fire.

"O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
To our sea-halls draped with green;
O come with us, rose-white Meenie,
And be our rose-white queen!"

But Clebrig heard; and the thunder
Down from his iron hand sped;
And the band of the wild witch-maidens
One swift shriek uttered, and fled.

And Meenie awoke, and terror
And wonder were in her eyes;
And she looked at the moon-white valley,
And she looked to the starlit skies.

O haste you back, Meenie, haste you,
And haste to your bed again;
For these are the wild witch-maidens
Down from the northern main.

O hear you not yet their singing
Come faintly back on the breeze?
The song of the weird witch-sisters
As they fly to the Iceland seas.

O hark!—'tis a sound like the sobbing
And sighing that brings a gale:
A low, sad song—as of sailors
That never again shall sail!

THE SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES OF PATSY CONG.

THE SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES OF PATSY CONG.

It was a clear-shining day in April; we were on a small blue lake set far away among the sterile brown moors of Connemara; and the long salmon rod lay over the gunwale of the boat, idly trailing behind it forty yards of line and a phantom minnow. Indeed the day was much too fine for proper fishing. One might as well have thrown a fly over the wood pavement in Pall Mall. It was a day rather for laziness, and conversation, and an inquiry into the mysteries of existence, if haply one or other of my companions had chanced to encounter any of these in this remote and solitary and silent part of the country. But Patsy did not look like a believer, somehow. He was a small, red-headed Celt, with shrewd, twinkling, gray-blue eyes; and there was frequently a sort of quiet, sardonic

humour running through his speech, accompanied now and again by a good-natured grin that overspread the little, pinched, sunburnt face. Moreover, Patsy had seen the world. In former years he had tried his luck in America; had been employed on various railways as far west as Council Bluffs; had had a turn at the Pittsburg ironworks; and was now returned to his native district with a wide and general knowledge of mankind. On the other hand, his neighbour at the bow, Tim Mulcahy by name, was nothing but a ghost and an echo. He was a small farmer who came down from his croft in the hills to eke out his living in this way—a characterless, white-faced, depressed-looking, amiable creature, who stared at his boots, lazily pulled at his oar, and limited his conversation to saying ditto to Patsy. "That's so, Patsy." "You're right, Patsy." "Not wan less than fourteen salmon did he catch that day." "Your father was a good man, Patsy; he wouldn't tell a lie for hardly anything." "That's true for you, Patsy; the like of thim for minnows I never saw."

Now at the head of this small lake that we were slowly and idly rowing round and round

stood a long, low cottage situated in the middle of a patch of trees—lilac-tinted leafless birches and sparkling dark-green hollies. In summer no doubt this must be a very charming place; even now the situation was picturesque enough—the still waters of the lake in front; the trees along the curving shore; and then rising far behind into the pale blue sky the vast and lonely and arid mountains known as the Twelve Pins of Binabola. This prettily-situated cottage, however, was unmistakably empty. The windows were barred up, there was a look of desolation around; not a sound of any kind came from that scattered grove of birch and holly.

"The very place to be haunted by a leprechaun, isn't it, Patsy?"

"Is it Barney Joyce your honour manes?" says the instantly loquacious Patsy; "the man that comes to look after the house? Well, now, your honour wouldn't believe what a great soldier that Barney is—oh, he is the mighty fine soldier, *by the fire.* Sure the battles he'll fight, and the campaigns, and the stratagims, and the ginerals, and the marchings, and the countermarchings! I niver heard his aqual; and the

divil a foot has he iver stirred out of Connemara!"

"But when the house is empty, Patsy, isn't there a ghost or a goblin somewhere about?"

"Well, indeed, the fairies used to come there," says Patsy, with indifference. "They used to say that. But thim ould stories are all nonsinse."

"They're all nonsinse, Patsy, thim ould stories," says Echo at the bow.

"Did you ever happen to hear what they called the King of the fairies?" I ask—curious to know whether the Don Fierna of the Blackwater and the south reigned also in these western wilds.

But Patsy was puzzled. Then he turned to Tim Mulcahy, and there was a long consultation in Irish, in the course of which a phrase sounding like *Piabara-Shee* was twice repeated.

"Had they a fairy-piper, then, Patsy?"

"Begob!" says Patsy eagerly, "that was him. The Fairy Piper was the King of thim, and manny a one has heard him playing in that very house there. I mane that was the ould story, sorr—but sure 'tis all nonsinse."

And now ensued a long and rambling general

conversation, which need not be set down here, on the subject of fairies, phantoms, leprechauns, and similar kittle cattle; throughout which Patsy was evidently anxious to show that he had discarded all such superstitions. Was it for one who lived in an age of reason—who had worked on the Union Pacific—to heed such folly? Nevertheless, Patsy was frankly disposed to admit that strange things might have happened—probably did happen—in former times.

"There was a power of witchery in this country in the ould days," said Patsy, gravely shaking his head; "yis, sorr, there was a power of witchery in this country in the ould days; but 'tis all gone away. Sure the people are turned more cunning now."

And then he added, more gloomily—

"But maybe there's more going on than we know."

By this time it had become pretty obvious that Patsy's eagerness to disclaim all belief in ghosts and witchery and the like was assumed—partly, no doubt, in prudent deference to the general opinion of a scientific and sceptical age, but partly, perhaps, because a man who had

been to Pittsburg felt bound to pose before a poor creature like Tim Mulcahy, who had never left his native mountains. And so, to find out whether Patsy might not have some reciprocal confidences to volunteer, I told him my own ghost story, which isn't much of a ghost story after all. That a lad of thirteen or fourteen should look in at the open door of a dining-room and behold there a woman seated before the fire; that he should carefully regard her shawl, and hat, and gown, wondering who she could be; that he should forthwith go and ask the other people in the house, and bring them to the door of the room, only to discover that the chair was vacant, and that by no possibility could any stranger have been there and left; and then to find that this portent was followed by no calamity whatever—neither a funeral nor a wedding nor anything—this, it must be confessed, was a poor and weak ghost story, which I should be ashamed to say a word about to the Psychical Society. But it deeply interested Patsy, and he was eager to know whether it was a real ghost, and when I answered that of course it was only an optical illusion, he remained silent for a time, and then repeated his wise aphorism—

"Maybe there's more going on than we know."

Again Patsy was silent for a time; and then, rather with the air of a man who is compelled to confess something against his will, he said—

"Well, sorr, now that we're on it, I will tell you what happened to me; but I don't like spaking of it—the less that's said the better—but I will tell you what happened to me, sorr; and it's manny the year since I tould any one the story. I was nineteen at the time. My mother and me, we had gone to the fair of Letternahinch to sell two sheep, and there we were all day, and the divil a bit could we sell the sheep. 'No matter, Patsy,' said my mother to me, at the ind of the day, 'you'll buy yourself the pair of new boots all the same, for who knows when we'll next be in at Letternahinch from the farm?' And so I bought the pair of boots—and mighty proud I was of thim, sorr, you may be sure; and I kept them on during the evening, until it was time for us to set out to walk back to the farm, for the divil an offer could we get for the sheep. Well, now, sorr, about tree miles from Letternahinch—or maybe 'tis tree miles and a half—there's a wood—and a dark wood it was that

night, though it was a moonlight night, and the road as white as silver—and says I, 'Mother, the new boots are hurting my feet; wait a minute now and I'll take them off.' But she went on with the sheep, and I was sitting down at the edge of the wood taking off the boots, whin there was a noise, and something rushed at me from the wood and hit me a slap, and went by. Sure I hope your honour 'll niver see anything like that terrible beast. 'Twas in the road now, and I was up, with the boots in one hand, and a little bit of a stick in the other, and I kept threatening it when it came near to attack me. I called out to my mother, but she was frightened too; she wouldn't look back. 'Come an, Patsy, come an!' she cried to me; and I dursn't run for fear of the beast."

"But what was it like, Patsy?"

"Well, sorr, I will make you sinsible of it; though I was all of a thrimble, for it followed me along the road, and sometimes 'twas in the ditch, and when I couldn't see it I heard it, and my mother heard it, and she was as terrified as I was. 'Twas about four or five feet long—yis, sorr, maybe five feet it was—and red, and when it put up its head, 'twas like to strike at me like

a snake ; but I had a bit of a stick in my hand, and I kept that turned to it. Maybe it had legs, but I could see none ; and the body—well now, the body was about the thickness of a thin dog, long and thin it was—and the noise it made was terrible, terrible. Well, now, sorr, maybe it was a fancy. I understand that. Maybe it was something in my own head—like a fever. But manny and manny is the time I have thought over it ; and what bothers me intirely is that my mother should have heard it when it was growling at me in the ditch."

Even now the recollection of this strange thing seemed to overshadow Patsy with fear and trembling. His eyes were distraught ; and he spoke like one speaking to himself, and describing something that he actually saw before him.

"'Twasn't the size of it, your honour, that frightened me ; sure it couldn't reach at me higher than the knee, when it put up its head as if it would strike me ; but there was something terrible about it that made me thrimble from me head to me foot. And whin I put down my stick it would keep back, running along by the side o' me, but always wid its head turned

to me, and threatening; and sure I was afraid to strike it, if I had had the power, but I was wake with the thrimbling; and my mother she wouldn't look back—'twas a God's truth, your honour, I never was in such a fright as that night. And thin, whin it left the road for a while, I knew it was there still all the time, by hearing of its growling at me; and at such times, whin it was in the ditch, I would have hurried on faster, and got up to my mother, but my legs were wake with the fright, and sure I was afraid it would come up behind me if I was to run. There now, sorr, there may be an explanation—I will not say no to that; maybe 'twas a kind of fever in my head; but sure that couldn't have made my mother hear the beast whin it was growling at me in the ditch, and made her hurry on too, for she was too frightened to look back?"

"But you haven't finished the story, Patsy: what became of the beast?"

"Well, 'twas a terrible night, your honour, and that's a fact. I thought we would never get to the farm, though my mother kept ahead of me with the sheep, and I was afraid to overtake her, for fear of giving the beast a chance at

me. Sure I think it must have been between one or two in the morning when we got up to the farm; and the beast kept following me—sometimes in sight, and sometimes in the ditch—all the way, until we were nearly at the door; and then it turned and went away down the hill again, and I saw it as far as the lake, but there I lost sight av it. Divil the wink of sleep did I get that night, you may be sure, sorr; and the next day my mother cautioned me not to spake of it to anny one, for fear of bad luck. Now, sorr, I will tell you something more about that same beast——"

But just at this moment, as it happened, the supernatural world got sudden notice to quit. There was a sharp, shrill shriek of the reel; instantly the rod was seized and raised; and then, forty yards away behind the boat, a creature—that seemed to the excited imagination about as long as the beast that Patsy had seen on the Letternahinch road—sprung into the air and fell back again with a mighty splash. Visionary monsters had to give way to this very actual animal that was now carrying on a series of unseen cantrips in the still waters of the lake. Patsy regarded the stand-up fight with

comparative indifference; his ministrations were not needed yet, and apparently he had no doubt of the result. Nor, indeed, with any ordinary care, ought there to have been any doubt of the result; for the fish was hooked with a phantom minnow, the tackle was tested, and the rod was a brand-new one, powerful enough to have hauled out a horse. But whoever thinks that fighting a salmon in such circumstances is too certain a thing, can have all the excitement he wants by importing into it two further conditions. First, let him have for his second boatman a person who, to use the American phrase, comprises within himself nine different sorts of a born fool; and then let him have for his chief boatman a superhumanly smart fellow (who has been to Pittsburg, and all the rest of it) and who is far too clever to gaff the salmon in the ordinary way, but who must needs make a plunging shot at the gill. When the twenty minutes or five-and-twenty minutes are over, and when the fish is being towed gradually nearer and nearer to the boat, then the angler will have quite enough of excitement—there will be no lack whatsoever of excitement. For, of course, when the fish happens to sheer along

the side of the boat, the nine-ply fool at the bow has his oar resting on the water; and when he is yelled to to lift his oar, of course he tries to draw it in; and of course the handle catches in the opposite gunwale; and of course the blade goes rasping across the now tightened line; while the language that suddenly fills the air becomes emphatic and figurative. Then the smart gentleman, to save the fish from the slight scar left by the ordinary method of gaffing, must perforce try for the gill; he misses it, and strikes the line; the fish plunges, and there is a pause of breathless despair. However, the upshot on this occasion, as it turns out, is more lucky than we have any right to expect, for after these twin stupidities, the frayed casting-line still holds; the olive-green back of the salmon by and by comes nearer the surface of the water, slowly and ineffectually heading this way and that; and then there is a quick dive of the sharp steel gaff, and the next second there is in the bottom of the boat a splendid large gleaming creature—no longer showing anything of olive-green, but all a flashing and glowing bronze-blue and silver. Of course at such a moment there can be nothing but reconciliation and forgiveness.

"Well, sorr," says Patsy from the deeps of his penitence, "when I missed him I felt sick."

And now the *redintegratio amoris* and the capture of the fish alike call for a modest libation; and presently, with a repetition of the accustomed toasts, "Good sport to your honour!" "A tight line to your honour!" we are again on our way round the lake, leisurely paying out the long line, and quite ready to hear further about the red beast of Letternahinch.

"Yes, sorr," says Patsy, "and this is the strangest part av it. Sure if no one had seen the beast but mesilf, one would say it was a drame, or what a man sees in a fever. But it wasn't the drink, anny way. When I was a young fellow the divil a drop would I touch; I wouldn't have drunk a glass of whisky if my throat had been as dhry as a limeburner's wig. But now I'll tell your honour what happened after that. 'Twas six months after—six or seven months after. My mother and me we had not been speaking about what had happened on the Letternahinch road, for the fright was on me for manny and manny a day; and my mother would never spake of it either, for fear of bad luck. Well, sorr, one evening I was going into

the house—'twas about supper-time—and I was thinking of nawthin' but that; and the door inside was a bit open. Well, sorr, there was a woman standing talking to my mother—well I knew the woman, she lived at Maskene—that was about eight miles further on the road—and my mother was asking her to sit down and rest herself, for 'twas a long way to go, and she had not passed our way for manny and manny a day. 'Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Cong,' says she, 'but 'tis a lonely road to Maskene, and I am frightened to be out after dark since what happened to me at Letternahinch.' Begob, sorr, you may suppose I listened thin; and her back was to me so that she couldn't see me, and my mother couldn't see me naythe because of the door. Well, sorr, what she said was that two years before she had been in at the market at Letternahinch, and she had a power o' things to carry; and so she waited for the night mail-car, that would put her down within a mile or so of Maskene. She was on the back-seat of the car, and there was no one else but the driver; and 'twas a fine clear night. Well, sorr, she declared that whin they were passing a wood about three miles from Ballynahinch, a terrible beast sprung

out of the wood and sprung right into the car, and stopped there beside her, and the divil a word or a cry could she get out, for the fright that was on her. How long the beast stopped in the car she did not say; nor was she saying annything of what it was like; and my mother seemed too frightened to ask her any questions. But that was the reason she made to my mother for going on in the daylight; and not a minute longer would she stop in the house. Now, sorr, what can anny one make of that? That was a year and a half before what happened to me, and at the very same part of the road."

"You hadn't heard the woman's story before, Patsy, and forgotten it? It wasn't the coming to the wood on the Letternahinch road that suddenly brought it back to your mind and frightened you?"

"Aw, the divil a bit, sorr! Sure I asked my mother about it, and 'twas thin for the first time she heard of it too, though 'twas mighty little you'd get her to spake about it. Well, sorr, that is all I know av it, and 'tis there I'll lave it; but depind on it, sorr, there's more going on than we know."

This, Patsy's favourite maxim, seemed to both

his companions so incontrovertible that they acquiesced in silence. As for Patsy himself, he seemed rather glad to get away from those memories. A kind of gloom had hung over him while he was recalling the various particulars; perhaps he shared his mother's fear that no good would come of speaking of such matters. At all events, as soon as he began to talk of legends and stories and superstitions in which he was not personally concerned, he quite recovered his ordinary cheerfulness of tone; indeed when he came to treat of the water-horses that used to haunt these lakes he spoke in quite a jaunty and matter-of-fact way, as if *their* existence "in the ould days" admitted of no manner of doubt whatever. Of course I was not surprised to find the water-horse myth as common here as it is in my own country, where every other loch has its circumstantial legend;* but the curious thing about the Connemara water-horses is that they are reported to have interbred freely with the farm-horses around, and that the offspring were put to work on the farm as an ordinary affair. But they were lazy animals, these half-breeds,

* See J. F. Campbell's *Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. iv

and not to be depended on whenever they came near a lake, for then, unless the farmer was on the watch, they would most likely make a bolt for the water, irrespective of what was behind them. In fact, there was a young animal of this uncanny blood employed on a farm belonging to Patsy's uncle; and one day it did make such a bolt, and was only prevented from plunging itself, and the car, and the driver, into a lake by the traces fortunately hitching (how, was not explained) on a rock.

I wonder if it was this same uncle who was the hero of Patsy Cong's next story. By this time, it may be unnecessary to say, I had come to regard my friend Patsy as a rank impostor. His Transatlantic experiences may have given him a thin veneer of scepticism, which he thought it fine to parade before the simple dwellers among the hills; but underneath that and deep down in his nature there obviously remained the ineradicable Celtic belief in a mysterious and magical world, just hidden, and no more than hidden, by the visible phenomena around. Patsy was clearly thrown away in Connemara. If only he had belonged to the wealthier classes, if he

had been brought up in a library, and got his brains bemuddled with neo-Platonism and port wine, there is no saying to what eminence he might not have risen as a writer of sentimental history or the constructor of a new ethical system. Here the gates were ajar to no purpose. Here he was tied down to the telling of old wives' tales about water-horses and the like.

"There's more going on than we know," says Patsy, surveying the still blue waters of the lake in an absent kind of way. "I'm sure of that, sorr. It's a positive fact. Maybe I wouldn't belave all the stories that are tould, but there's something—there's something. There was my uncle, now, that lived at Kincree; and he used to be going down to the sayshore, coortin' the young woman that he was to marry. Well, one evening as he was coming back, he stopped to talk to some min that were blasting rocks near the roadside; and I don't know how it was, but there was a quarrel and a fight, and one of the min he takes up the blasting rod and hits my uncle with it over the head, and there he was, a dead man. Well, sorr, it was about a year after my uncle was killed there that a woman living

close by in the neighbourhood went out from her cabin with a milking-pail in her hand, and went up the hillside to milk the cows. They saw her go up—more than one saw her go away—and she was quite alone by herself. Well, sorr, she didn't come down again, and they got frightened, and they went in search of her, and the divil a sight of her could they find annywhere. Well, now, your honour, this is the story av it; sure, I'm only saying what I was tould about it, and what every one about there belaves until this day. 'Twas on the evening of the third day after that that she came down again—looking very quare she was—and she said she had met the man that was murdered the year before—sure, that was my uncle—and he had taken her away with him over the hills, she could not tell where. I don't know what to make av it; but 'twas a strange story annyhow."

"Patsy," remarks one of the two listeners, "was there a *bothan dubh* in those hills?"

"What's that, sorr?"

"What they call in Scotland a *black bothy** —an illicit still. Weren't they brewing a

* It is said that the "black bothies" have considerably increased in number of late years in several districts of the

little potheen up in the hills, and glad to get the woman to help them for a day or two?"

"I don't know about that, sorr," said Patsy. "But annyhow, she was never the same woman after it—no, sorr—there was always something weighing on her mind, and she never got the better of it. I suppose she's dead now."

Here Patsy paused, and had a look round the sky, for there had been some faint indications that we might after all get a breath of wind; and then, still working away at the easy oar, he continued:

"No, sorr, I say nawthin' about thim stories but that they were tould to me. What happened to mesilf on the Letternahinch road, that was different—begob, I'm not likely to forget that. But there was something that happened to my father that was strange too, and I know he wouldn't tell a lie about it."

"Your father was a good man, Patsy, he wouldn't tell a lie about hardly annything," says the meek Chorus.

Highlands, despite the successive raids of the supervisors of the Inland Revenue.

"'Twas whin I was a boy, but well I remimber it," says Patsy. "He was at work on the farm, and my sister had to carry him his dinner, and they sate down on the side of a little hill where it was too rough and rocky for digging—the divil a thing could a spade do wid it. Well, sorr, there was a woman coming along the road that knew my father, and she sate down wid them for a minute or two, to put the basket off her shoulders, and there they were sitting whin they heard people speaking below them inside the hill. Oh, as clear as annything they heard the voices below the ground, so the woman tould me, for I met her as I was going to the field not five minutes after. And says she, 'Patsy, ask your father was he hearing annything when your sister and him and me were sitting on the hill.' Well, sorr, I went along, and there was my father at his work again; and I went down to him, and asked him about what the woman tould me. 'Yes, Patsy, true it is,' says he, 'but it is not a thing to be spaking about;' and he wouldn't answer no more questions. No, sorr, not thin nor at anny other time; he would be getting angry wid us when we were afther asking him anny questions

about it. Sure, sorr, there must be somethin' in it. The woman might be making up a story to frighten us childer, but my father wouldn't tell a lie about it. There's something going on, sorr, and that's the truth. It's a positive fact. And if the ould witchery has gone away from the country, since the people are more cunning now, still, there may be other things that we don't know. That's true, sorr, that's a positive fact. But what does your honour think av it, if I may be so bould as to ask?"

But now there is something far more stirring ahead than clattering dry bones of discussion or weaving impalpable webs of theory; for the little varying puffs of wind have been gradually increasing to a good, steady, honest breeze; quickly it is resolved (seeing that Patsy's experiences of the supernatural have carried us on till near lunch-time, and the process of landing, collecting sticks, lighting a fire, and cooking our pot of Irish stew is a tedious one) to have a final try with the fly before the picnic begins; so the long line is rapidly got in; the minnow and trace detached; there is a word or so about the rival claims of a "Harlequin," a "Gray Monkey," and the shining "Flower of Kelso;"

ultimately these are all discarded in favour of the old, familiar, and ubiquitous "Jock Scott;" and presently we are making our way across the now ruffled bosom of the lake to try our luck in the plashing and whirling waters of the Butt of Derryclare.

AN APRIL DAY ON THE OYKEL.

AN APRIL DAY ON THE OYKEL.

VERY leisurely indeed, on this fair morning, do we leave the lodge and wander down to the river; for although the stream is in excellent order, and there is a soft west wind blowing, there is a blaze of sunlight abroad that puts fishing entirely out of the question. And even if we have to wait for the lengthening shadows of the afternoon before a single cast is made, it will be no difficult task to let the idle hours go by. To live is enough—amid all these beautiful things. For in Ross-shire a bright day in April is the very crown and glory of the year, so far as colour is concerned—the far-stretching hills are of a soft, rich russet, broken here and there by the deep green of a clump of pines; the leafless birches that line each ascending corrie are of a dark rose lilac; while nearer at hand are silver-grey rocks, heathery knolls, and woods carpeted

with the crimson and yellow of bracken and withered grass. Then the river itself is of perpetual interest—its long, silver stretches; its narrow chasms with the water boiling and foaming in tawny masses; its shallows with the sunlight chasing the ripples over the golden sand; its dark and oily pools, purple-blue for the most part, but with every eddy and wavelet showing a reflection of light olive-green from the opposite bank. Supposing that no fishing is practicable, how can one be better employed by the side of such a stream than in forming a series of little cabinet pictures, and printing them into the memory, so that, in far other times and places—when Miss Inanity is talking at dinner, or when Behemoth has become blatant over the claret—one can quietly slip away and gaze upon the Rock Pool again? "I have found a refuge in my trouble; and the wicked shall not prevail."

To be sure, luncheon comes in as a not unwelcome break. My companion on this occasion is a young artist-friend, who, after long periods of meditative silence (no doubt he is wondering by what miracle Winsor and Newton are going to yield him those flashing lights and brilliant

hues all around him), betrays a merry and an antic humour, especially when his pipe has been lit; and we are in no hurry to move. Our gillie (the League and Covenant, we call him, because of his superlative solemnity) has also betaken himself to tobacco, by the side of a knoll on which the two Castle-Connells and the gaff shine conspicuous. It seems useless to look at the sky. Now and again, indeed, a bit of silver cloud comes sailing slowly over from the west; but as it nears the sun, it either melts away into nothingness, or separates and goes off into useless shreds. We watch a water-ousel, skipping from stone to stone. We follow the circling and hovering of a pair of kestrels high in air, and would fain bid them beware of Master Hugh and his traps. And then we turn to legends and the days and deeds of old; for right down below us is the rock at which a fish fell away from a fly just as the gaff was being put out—fell away and floated away, so exhausted that he could not even give us a parting and derisive wag of his tail; and over there is the run in which the eighteen-pounder sulked and sulked until the evening closed in, he eventually having to be gaffed in the dark, by the exercise

of some superhuman instinct on the part of Andrew; while up yonder is the bush under which a hooked salmon took refuge, refusing to be dislodged until old Robert sprung up on the bank, with his arms extended like a semaphore. Again the reel screams; again the white wonder leaps into the air; each and every incident of the long-protracted struggle comes back again. This is another of those inestimable mental pictures that time cannot destroy.

As the afternoon creeps on, the colours of the hills become richer and richer; the russet is tending to rose; while the blue and silver of the stream remain as clear and shining as ever. But suddenly a new feature is introduced into the landscape. On the dark slopes beyond the river a sharp gleam of rose-hued flame appears. It spreads, at first slowly and flickeringly; then the wind catches it, and sweeps it onward, until knoll after knoll is one sheet of crimson fire, and volumes of smoke are rolling away across the valley. The heather has been set alight by a shepherd; and soon there is a wide sea of flame, the crimson waves blown by the wind; while a curious fluffing noise, like the sound of a plover's

wings, becomes audible, along with the crackling and spluttering of the stems and twigs. Opalescent the smoke is, and the transfiguration it effects on the distant hills and clouds that shine through it is most extraordinary. For there are clouds up there in the north, though none will come our way—clouds, massive and storm-portending; a blaze of saffron some of them, as if they were gazing out upon the western sea, over the peaks of Suilven and Canisp. No; in our direction not one shred or tatter comes along; there is nothing for it but to wait for the going down of the sun; and so we wander idly away back again to the Rock Pool, which will first of all be in shadow.

Fishing begins about half-past five, my young friend going down to the lower waters of the pool and I taking the upper. The Rock Pool altogether is about the likeliest-looking stretch of a salmon river that the mind of man could conceive (and many a good fish has come, and will come, out of it), with its oily, black swirls and its spaces of lapping current; but the head of it, it must be admitted, is a difficult place to fish. The banks behind are almost sheer, and then there are innocent little birch-bushes

projecting over the water in a delightful kind of way that Mr. Alfred Parsons would very much admire, but that are fatal to any careless cast. I should think the flies that have been hung up on those bushes must be about as numerous as the sets of indifferent verses that Orlando pinned upon the Arden trees in praise of his merry Rosalind. However, on this occasion no mishap occurs—only, not a fin moves. We pass along down stream. The Narrows Pool is much more easily fished, for here one wades in a considerable distance, and nothing is to be feared from behind. Moreover, the wind has now entirely died away, and the woods on the opposite brae are darkening the water. Everything is favourable, but that the surface is so glassily calm, and that there is little current to take down the fly. Nevertheless, it is a gracious evening, so serene and still is it. Surely some unseen creature, over there in the deeper runs, may be induced to quit his favourite haunt and come out for a little sporting adventure. The Childers is such a pretty thing to play with—blue, and gold, and crimson, and tinsel—and life must be rather monotonous by the side of a big brown stone, under three or four feet of water. Recollections

of the sea must stir in one's mind on seeing this shrimp-like thing jerking over one's nose, and even if one is not very hungry, why not give chase just for a bit of a frolic? But nothing of the kind happens. Those long, dark, glassy swirls remain unbroken. Time after time the line goes away across in search, and time after time it is swung harmlessly again into the air. Then the Brae Pool (which is the most detestable place to fish ever beheld by mortal man) and the ominously-named Cemetery Pool are too far away to be included in this evening's work. One begins to think of a return to the lodge and to dinner, and with no great joy.

"Better put a few casts over the Stones Pool, sir," suggests Hugh, who is seated on the bank with his gun by his side.

"But Mr. M—— has just been over it."

However, there is this to be said: my young artist friend, though an excellent fisherman, is new to the river, and like most other people, is inclined to be careless of pools in which he has not seen a fish captured. So I betake me to the Stones Pool—so named from two rocks in the middle of the river—and begin perfunctorily to thrash away, though not with much hope. But

at all events I have an idea where the fish lie; and this is my last chance for the evening, so that it is worth while to be cautious. And at last, and all of a sudden, I find my line held. Now you are aware, Mr. Editor,* of the endless controversy as to whether you should or should not strike a rising salmon: your own columns have borne testimony. Well, I will simply confess that, being a duffer, I never attempt such a thing. I know that I have again and again seen the most expert fishermen whip away the fly from the fish's mouth, through this anxiety to strike; and I know that the professional fishermen on the Shannon almost allow the salmon to eat the fly before they check the line—just as any one who is trolling allows the salmon to eat a phantom minnow: if you snatch at the rod the moment you see the top begin to vibrate, it is an absolute certainty that you pull away the minnow altogether. Of course, when you feel that the salmon has taken the fly, you hold your hand against it: you don't lower the top, and assist the fish to shake the fly out of his mouth, if that remains possible. My sole contention is that when a salmon means busi-

* The Editor of the *Fishing Gazette*.

ness, he will hook himself—unless you have slack line in the water, when he may manage to get rid of the unholy thing he has unwittingly pounced upon, though even that is highly improbable. What luckless fisherman who has ever got a fly into his finger or his ear has been able to get it out again by shaking his hand or his head?

To return. My Stones Pool fish is certainly hooked; but he has not the least intention of making that the end of the transaction. The first thing he does is to throw himself clean out of the water—a gleam of silver and purple in the warm evening light—and then when he returns to his proper element he lies low, like Brer Rabbit, and begins a series of most vicious tuggings. Now, there is nothing I fear so much as a tugger. The fish may do anything else he pleases—make long rushes, fly into the air, lash the surface with his tail; but when he begins to tug I am filled with a terrible suspicion that he has discovered on some former occasion the surest way of getting the fly out of his jaw. By this time Hugh has whistled for the League and his gaff; and my young artist friend comes along also;

so that there is quite a gallery of spectators on the bank—"a perfect Peeccadeely," as the deer-stalker said. And a very pretty performance it is, with such a setting as no scene-painter ever dreamed of. For now the western clouds are all aflame with rose; and in the clear violet or violet-blue over our heads shines the young moon; while on the smooth waters of the pool all these are reflected—long swathes of crimson, long swathes of blue, and the golden crescent of the moon, trembling with the oscillations one makes in backing from or following the salmon.

"Did you ever in your life see anything so marvellous?" I asked of my young friend.

"I think you'd better attend to your fish," he replied, in his imperturbable way.

But the salmon is not demanding much attention just at the moment. He has flung himself twice into the air; and has made a number of short rushes—not any one of them more than fifteen or twenty yards; and now he is merely amusing himself with boring into deep water, with an occasional savage tug. He is a biddable kind of creature too; I find I can lead him; and, seeing that, Hugh gets hold of the gaff,

wades out to the nearest of the two rocks, and crouches there, intently peering over the edge.

"Bring him up this way, sir!"

Well, that is more easily said than done, for the current between the two stones is heavy; but at last I have him guided, not only up to the two stones, but through them, and momentarily I wait for the dash of the clip. There is no sign.

"He is close to you, Hugh," I shout.

"I cannot see him at all, sir, for the light," is the answer.

"He is within a foot of you—don't you see the line?"

Of course he sees the line; but he is not such a fool as to swoop at an unseen object on chance.

I can see the fish clearly enough, from the angle at which I stand; but the blaze of that rose and steel-blue on the surface is too much for the keeper. My artist-friend afterwards declared he had never seen anything so picturesque: the shining waters, the dark woods beyond, the keeper crouching on the gray rock, the line steadily advancing until it severed in

twain the yellow sickle of the moon. And then the fish, thinking it had had enough of this heading against the current, turns tail, and takes me away down with it to the shallows and shingle at the lower end of the pool.

"I sympathise with that fish," a young M.P. —now he is an ex-M.P.—once said to me on this same river. "He has fought so splendidly for his liberty that he deserves it—and I shan't be in the least sorry if he gets it."

But republican sentiments of that kind are out of place on the banks of a salmon pool, at which brute force (I mean the casting-lines got at the Army and Navy stores) must ultimately prevail. My small nine-pounder fights up and down and across, tugs, bores, splashes, lies quiescent, makes small rushes, allows himself to be guided in those, and then heads gallantly out again, and indeed holds his own so stoutly and well that before he is finally swooped up by the gaff and laid on the bank the glory has quite gone from the smooth sweeps of water, and dusk and silence have fallen over the land. A small fish, but a brave fighter. And then, as we walk away home through the still darkness, we come in sight of more sharp lines and breadths of

crimson—the red flames lighting up the night: it seems as though the twin counties of Ross and Sutherland are all on fire. Finally, a snug little dining-room—some Highland mutton—a long smoke thereafter—and then to bed with the parting benediction, "Your turn to-morrow!"

A DAY'S STALKING.

A DAY'S STALKING.

WHAT is the extreme amount of physical torture and of mental anguish that a human being can manage to endure in the course of a single day? There must, of course, be many and diverse answers to such a question; but here at least is one solution which some folk may perhaps be disposed to regard as being not very wide of the mark.

As the silver-grey dawn begins to steal up the silent strath—here in the remote wilds of Ross-shire—you awaken with a haunting sense of impending doom. What is it, then? Are you going to be hanged? Alas! no—for hanging would be over at eight o'clock; and thereafter would follow silence and peace. Are you going to make a first appearance on the stage? Well, that is not very pleasant; especially when you have no business there, and if you are

anxious the public should not perceive that the ancient shepherd is wearing spectacles—for ancient shepherds were not in the habit of wearing spectacles in the days of Leontes and Polixenes. No, it is something far worse than that; and now you know you cannot escape from it; for certain soft footfalls on the grass without inform you that the ponies have already arrived. You get up and look from the window. Yes, there they are: Beauly the white, furnished with a deer-saddle to bring home the stag that was shot yesterday; and Bonar the brown, having an ordinary saddle to carry you away into the wilderness where your sufferings are to begin. And there, too, is Peter, smoking a solitary pipe; for Hugh, the head-keeper, went away long before daybreak, to spy out the land.

Breakfast over, you stealthily leave the sleeping house, and presently the mute procession is making away down to ford the river. And perhaps it is to avoid the thought of all that is to follow that the mind seeks refuge in a little meditation, of the modern kind. Why, now, should ponies—and presumably horses—betray such terror on "winding" a deer? This Bonar that one is riding is quite a favourite with the

gillies because he can be got to approach a slain stag; but even he must have his nose smeared with the stag's blood first, to render him callous to the scent. The other ponies shiver with fright the moment they "wind" a deer, and swerve away in terror so that the foresters have sometimes a fine job of it before they can get the carcass strapped on the saddle. Now how should the pony or the horse have acquired any dread of the most timorous and harmless creature that exists? Or is it that they have inherited a fear of some predatory beast whose scent resembled that of the deer? And what horrible creature was it, then, that roamed the ancient Caledonian forest, the terror of the more peaceful animals in the straths? And how many ages ago?

Whirr! A grouse-cock springs from a heathery knoll—the unexpectant Beauly jumps aside in sudden fright—and behold! Peter is lying on his back, with one foot still dangling in the stirrup. But Beauly remains stock still; the discomfited horseman, scowling vengefully, gets up again, and gives the poor brute a savage kick ere he remounts into the saddle: therewithal we get down to the river, to seek out the ford.

Now Bonar has the reputation of knowing every ford in this stream much more accurately than any native of the district; and the usual fashion is to put him into the water and let him find his way across for himself. But this morning—whether it is that the recent spate has altered the look of the bank, or what not—Bonar seems afraid to venture. While as yet the water is hardly over his knees, he regards the swollen blue-brown current with a dark suspicion, and keeps edging his way further and further down-stream, until one begins to think he is making for the Kyle of Sutherland. And then what command have you over him, when you are holding your feet level with his ears? But at last he makes the plunge—pauses to get his weight against the heavy stream—cautiously and with slow travail forces his way through—and at length we reach the land. Then there is a stiff climb—with one's nose, now, instead of one's feet, close to the pony's ears—up some hundred yards or so of a hill-side about as steep as the side of a house; and finally we gain the highway, where both the ponies are put into a gentle trot.

Then come back those awful warnings of

Scrope, of St. John, of Colquhoun, and all the other authorities. What avail the bull's-eyes at the target on the hill-side, if a fit of "buck-ague" is likely to seize one at the critical moment, or if an excited forester should alarm the stag before you have got the twin sights rightly on him? Or, again, supposing you have your nerves absolutely under control, what if your opportunity should come late in the day, when your teeth are chattering in your head with cold, and your frozen fingers trembling? The look of the morning around you is not too encouraging. Snow lies thick on the higher hills; a wintry sleet has begun to blow down from the north; and if the wind as yet, here in the glens, is mild enough, you know what it will be in the bleak altitudes whither you are bound. Moreover, another misfortune now befalls the luckless Peter. Suddenly Beauly stops short in the middle of the highway, and begins to lash out with her hind legs. Peter descends, quickly. He makes a pretence of examining the harness, but in a hopeless kind of way.

"She's aye like that, wi' the deer-saddle," says he; and then he adds with resignation: "I'll chist hef to wahk." So we set off at foot-pace

now, to get over the long and weary miles that lie between us and the haunted ground.

Shortly after leaving the highway we have to ford another river; and here an unexpected descent of Bonar into a deep hole fills one's boots with water; but this is rather an advantage, for it relieves one from all further anxiety; indeed, as the persistent soaking of the sleet is now beginning to penetrate even Harris homespun, there is not much use in trying to keep one's feet dry when one's shoulders and knees are wet. After crossing this river and going through some woods, we get away up into a much wilder country. All signs of civilisation gradually cease: what could civilisation do with this wild waste of bog and rock? As one looks at the hopeless swamps, at the sterile slopes scarred with peat-hags, and the stony heights above, it is with a petulant wish that some half-dozen of the people who in the House of Commons express their innocent views about unreclaimed land could have a free gift granted them of a dozen square miles of this country: on the condition, however, that, after a certain time, if it was found they could not make a living out of it, they should have ten

years in Millbank Penitentiary for talking trash. However, that is the autocratic way of settling questions, and is not in favour at present. What claims more immediate attention (as the wise and faithful Bonar, having left the hill-track far behind, is now choosing a path for himself, clambering over boulders and stones, or carefully descending into swampy little gullies) is this:—Every one knows that it is no use going after the deer unless a young lady—the prettier the better—gives you some little present to take with you for luck. Well, supposing the young lady, out of her native generosity, has sent you an enormous length of rose-red ribbon; and supposing that, out of further generosity, you have shared this gift with your companions—until, indeed, every noble sportsman in the lodge is proudly wearing a crimson neck-tie, manipulated by his own clumsy fingers; supposing, in short, you have nothing but a scrap left for yourself—what if that scrap should prove a half-exhausted talisman, like the one described by Mr. Besant and Mr. Pollock in these pages?* Or what—still more hideous thought!—if it were to act the wrong way, like

* *Longman's Magazine.*

the repellent pole of a magnet, or the brain of the young man of whom Mr. Longfellow used to tell a tale ? * For, alas ! the mind instinctively turns to gloomy portents and forebodings, in this solitude of mists, and moorland, and sombre, voiceless hills.

At length, after some eight miles of lonely travel, we reach the little ravine in which the ponies are usually left; but on this occasion Beauly only is hobbled and turned loose; the faithful Bonar, with the deer-saddle transferred to his back, is to come on with us to bring home the stag that was shot yesterday. Meanwhile Peter is attentively scanning the vast extent of

* "Mr. Longfellow," said the breathless and bewildered young man (meaning to say quite the opposite), "I—I—am one of the—one of the few people who have read your *Evangeline*." It is to be suspected, however, that Longfellow used to invent some of those stories. That of the Englishman, who said, "Very glad to have seen you, Mr. Longfellow; you know there are no other old ruins in your country"—that legend sounds a little apocryphal. There is a more natural touch about the tale of the western man who came to see Longfellow's house which had been General Washington's head-quarters during the war of independence; and when he was taking leave of the venerable poet, who had most courteously shown him over the place, shook hands and said, "Well, good-bye, General; I am proud to see you looking so hale at your advanced age."

lifeless country that lies to the east and west and south of us.

"I'm not seeing him," he observes at length —for apparently there is no Hugh anywhere within sight.

"Where shall we make for, then, Peter?"

"We'll chist mek for the top, sir," he answers, looking across a wide waste of moorland to the far crest of a line of hill.

Well, well. One who has been up to that skyline before accepts his fate with resignation. He knows how Peter will proceed. No avoidance of swamps, no zigzag of steep places, no temporising with the deep peat-hags filled with drifts of snow; but a bee-line for the summit—that is Peter's way. At first of course, we have to descend into the little ravine and cross the burn—wading through it, in fact, for both of us are wet to the skin by this time, though it is yet but about ten o'clock. Then begins the laborious toil across the marshy flats—unreclaimed land with a vengeance, that allows you to sink to the knees at every step, in a spongy mixture of moss and water. Poor Bonar has a bad time of it here; sometimes he gets bogged altogether, and resolutely stands still, hard-

breathing; whereupon Peter goes in front of him, and with both hands on the rein hauls at his four-footed companion's head until Bonar makes another frantic effort to free himself. By-and-by we get up to harder ground, cut in every direction by black peat-hags, into which one slips, and out of which one scrambles. Here and there in the hags are drifts of snow—a nice soft bed some eight or ten feet deep, if one were to stumble in. The higher one gets, the keener blows the wind, the wilder come those blasts of sleet; but it is not cold that is the trouble; indeed one is glad to perceive that even Peter, hardy mountaineer as he is, has his face ablaze, and that more than once he has to remove his cap and mop the perspiration off his streaming hair. What is of more consequence than either cold or heat is the fact that the clouds are coming down, threatening to extinguish the land altogether. The sharp white peaks of Suilven and Canisp, and the heavy shoulders of Benmore, have long since vanished; on the hills quite close to us the mists are slowly descending, approaching stealthily, imperceptibly; an overshadowing gloom is gradually encompassing the world.

Suddenly, through the bewilderment of mist and sleet, a figure appears—a startling thing in this solitary place; and here is the broad-shouldered and long-limbed Hugh, himself hard-blown, for he must have come from a great distance, and at an extraordinary pace, to overtake us. It turns out that Master Peter has mistaken his directions; that Hugh was waiting for us some miles below; that half his morning's work has gone for nothing.

"Have you seen anything, Hugh?"

"Oh, yes, sir; but they're away down at the east end, this side the Glass-alt burn." And then he turns with a look of gentle reproach to Peter. "You've made it an ahfu' round for us" —and well does a not uninterested bystander know what *that* brief phrase means.

On we go again, clambering up this steep hillside, making use of the peat-hags mostly, unless where the snow renders them impassable, until a further halt is called, when Peter and the pony are sent off in a certain direction, towards the slain stag that is lying somewhere concealed. Thereafter Hugh and his remaining companion, each with a rifle over his shoulder, continue this heart-breaking climb until they reach the

watershed along the crest of the hill, where more circumspection becomes necessary, for the valley now opening out below them has to be carefully scanned. But what is the use? Momentarily the clouds are stealing further and further down; finally we are inclosed on all hands by an impenetrable grey veil—a girl could fling a stone further than we can see. And then one discovers by the wind that Hugh is making west.

"Look here, Hugh; are you going to help Peter with the stag?"

"Yes, sir."

"How far away is it?"

"Oh, just a mile or two."

A mile or two!—one knows what that imports.

"And of course you are coming back this way."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"All right. I'm going to bury myself in a peat-hag, out of the wind, and wait for you."

"Very well, sir. It'll be a long time before I am back; but you'll no move out o' the peat-hag, sir, or mebbe I'll no be finding you in the mist

A deep black gully is chosen; the rifle is placed handy, lest a stag should come wandering through the clouds; the long figure of the forester vanishes away like a phantom; and a solitary human creature is left to pace up and down a few feet of grass protruding from the snow, with such reflections as are appropriate to the occasion. At first, indeed, there is no great physical discomfort; for although the wind comes swirling round into the peat-hag, still, as one is all ablaze with the long fatigues of the morning, it is rather pleasant than otherwise. But as that temporary heat cools down, and is succeeded by the consciousness that you are wet through—with perspiration, or with sleet, or with both combined—then these gusts begin to strike chill indeed. You face them, and they seem to go right through your chest; you turn your back, and they appear to pierce your very marrow. Exercise is hardly possible in this restricted space; besides, so long as you stand still, the water in your boots remains in a kind of tepid state; whereas when you move an icy thrill strikes through your feet. As for a stag coming across, which would be the more frightened—it or you? No, there is nothing

for it but to stand idly about on the snow—which is drier than the grass, if that is any advantage—shifting from time to time to expose some other section of your fast-freezing body to the bitter blast, watching for the reappearance of a spectral world through this pale curtain of cloud, and wondering whether you would like to be buried in Kensal Green or on the western shores of the island of Ulva.

And then you think of your friends, particularly those of them who are at this moment wending their way to Pall Mall. There goes one of them up the steps of his club. Of course he stops for his letters, for this is the great Literary Octopus, whose far-reaching tentacles suck sustenance from all parts of the world; and in that bundle of envelopes there are doubtless contributions (the smallest thankfully received) from Cathay, unconsidered trifles from Tasmania, post-office orders from Newfoundland. Then, burdened with his various wealth, he seeks the coffee-room. And oh, how ill he is!—a crumpled rose-leaf woke him this morning seven minutes before the proper time; and nothing will restore him now but a luncheon that five stout navvies could hardly make away

with. It is a horrid sight to see the curried prawns, the roast mutton and jelly, the stewed prunes, the cheese and celery, the French pears and what not disappear into that capacious maw: indeed—why—instinctively one's hand gradually sidles into a certain pocket, and behold! a little paper parcel. It is all wet now with the sleet; but that can't be helped. The bread is moist; the flakes of cold meat are limp; the salt has melted. But it is food, and it affords occupation. When the drink question comes along, that is less easily settled, for there is no water within miles, even if one dared venture out in search of it; so there is but the other alternative —to half fill your mouth with snow, add some whisky, and swallow the mixture: *Deus sit propitius huic potatori!* Of course the inner man—the vagus nerve, that is—howls aloud! "Here, what on earth do you mean? What are you doing? What's this? Do you call this a drink?" No, I don't call it a drink; I don't call a decoction of minced North Pole and fire a fluid of any sort or kind; but it is the only thing procurable. A great poet of our own day, who is passionately fond of the sea, and is also an excellent swimmer, declares that, if you are

pent up in town or country, you have only to use samphire soap in order to induce the impression that you have just come in from breasting the breakers off the rocks of Alderney or Sark. Well, a man may persuade himself of much; but if he has just swallowed a combination of snow—of granulated ice, rather—and Highland whisky, I will defy him to believe that he has had a drink.

Without any warning of sound an apparition starts out of the clouds; this is Hugh come back; and right joyfully does the frozen mummy in the peat-hag receive the intelligence that there is a long tramp before him, for there is now a prospect of getting thawed into life again. It is true the deer are not more than four or five miles off; but we have to make a long détour in order to avoid giving them our wind; and our road lies over the roughest possible ground. As we get away from those chilly altitudes, we leave the snow behind; the mist clears so that a sort of phantom world becomes visible, but a world without perspective; everything is vertical—the Glass-alt burn appears like a bit of white ribbon suspended from the sky. We are now considerably over our march;

but as two friends of ours are in temporary occupation of the neighbouring forest, that does not greatly matter. On and on we toil until we are almost down into the valley; indeed, at one point, a chance slip comes near to bringing the stalk and the career of the present writer alike to a sudden end, for he goes softly gliding down a slope of peat, and is just about being hurled into the ravine below when his feet happen to catch on a stump of a birch-tree, and he is enabled slowly to clamber up again. By this time Hugh is a long way ahead, making straight for the promised land.

But when at length he gets near to the neighbourhood where he saw the deer in the morning, he begins to walk more cautiously—then stealthily—sometimes stooping, and always anxiously scanning every distant knoll and gully. All at once he drops down on the ground, prone, and after a minute's quiet proceeds to get out his telescope and push it through the grass and heather in front of his nose. Then he turns round and crawls back for some distance before he thinks it safe to get up; and when he speaks he speaks in awful whispers.

"They're feeding again," he says, "but they've moved up wind. We'll have to go aweh back."

Away back? Well, well, it is all in the day's work; one shoulders the rifle again, and resumes the weary trudge over this long heather and up and down and over those interminable peat-hags. It is pitiful to see our own tracks in the black soft soil, and to know that all this labour has been wasted. The rifle gets to be abnormally heavy. Crouching was never the natural gait of man. What happens when the lungs burst?

By-and-by after a long circuit the crouching becomes lower and lower, until finally Hugh goes down on his face and begins to get forward as though he were slowly swimming. I have to do the like; only that whereas Hugh can safely push along his rifle parallel with himself, I have (for fear of accident) to shift mine transversely, half a foot at a time, which is a most hampered method of progression. Moreover, it is hard that when once the water that has soaked through one's clothes has been comfortably warmed up by all the previous toil, it should now be chilled, or displaced, by new water from

the outside. Every movement forward sends a fresh ice-current up to the elbows, and from the knees down to the boots. One's face and knuckles are torn by the twigs of the heather; but that is less of a consideration than the fact that the hand that holds the rifle is deadly cold and stiff. Hugh swims more cautiously now—inch by inch he gets along: then he stops short, to allow me to crawl up to his side. The rifles are stealthily taken out of their waterproof cases, and put on full cock.

"I can only see two hinds," he says in a whisper, "but the others are no far off. There's five hinds and a stag."

Does this right hand tremble? Not a bit. Nerves?—like a rock. You only clinch your teeth a little.

All of a sudden a startling vision presents itself: there are two living creatures—two beautiful animals, of a warm dun colour—quietly trotting along the top of a distant knoll, if that can be called a trot which is rather a light springing over the tall heather. Portentously large they look after our long wandering through an empty world—a bewilderment, too, for in one brief second you have to ask and answer yourself half

a dozen questions. Is it worth while trying for one of these hinds? How many yards off? Better wait for a chance at the stag? Will they carry the alarm? Is this all that we are to see of the deer?

"Will ye take the shot, sir?—they're about three hundred yards," says Hugh, not very eagerly, as the light-limbed, slim-necked creatures keep on their way, hardly seeming to touch the earth.

"No; a stag or nothing. But what started them?"

"They've got suspicious about something," is Hugh's whispered answer, as he cautiously rises to his feet, and looks across to the little plateau where he had last seen the deer feeding.

"Will they frighten the others away?" is the next question.

"Maybe they'll no go far. We'll just have to search the small corries."

Searching the small corries sounds an innocent kind of thing; but it turns out to be a terrible business; for it is nearly all either crouching or crawling, and it is protracted until the misery of it becomes almost unendurable. Moreover, it is raining persistently—not that

that can make you any wetter than you are, but that, if you are wearing spectacles, the landscape becomes transformed into a sort of nebulous phantasmagoria; and what are your chances of getting the stag even if you were to find him? No; you begin to think it is a shame to shoot such beautiful creatures. Why should they not be left to the freedom of their native wilds, to the fierce joy of the tournaments in mid-October, to the milder graces of maternity in the spring? Are not all of us *ferœ naturœ* in a sense?—is there not a certain kinship?—

Down drops Hugh on the heather, as if he had been shot through the heart. When one slowly and arduously creeps up to him, it is to find that he is peering into a sort of hollow surrounded by low knolls. With his hand he beckons his unfortunate pupil to come up.

"The stag and four of the hinds are there," he says, apparently talking into the ground.

A little further crawling, the raising of your head an inch, and you see a strange thing amazingly near you. It is the back of a deer, of a vivid fawn colour, and the animal is quietly

feeding not fifty yards off. The agonised excitement of such a moment! The head of the deer being out of sight, you cannot tell whether this is the stag or only one of the hinds; if it is one of the hinds, how are you to get at the stag without alarming his companion?

"Hugh, is that the stag?"

"Yes, yes, sir," is the muttered reply.

Perhaps the slight hissing sound has reached him. He raises his head slightly—then he throws it right up and shows his branching antlers—a noble sight! The rifle is quickly pushed through the heather—how long will the stag remain motionless? Surely he has caught sight of Hugh?

"Fire, sir, fire; he'll be away!" calls out Hugh, oblivious of consequences; and how in your desperation can you tell him to be quiet? No, there is nothing for it now but to take a snap-shot—well forward—with such steadying of the two sights as is possible in this wild second—the haphazard shot is fired—the stag bounds forward just an instant too late—Hugh springs to his feet, makes for the top of the knoll, and has a right and left at him as he flies over the crest—he loads again

and tries to pick off a hind—I take a despairing farewell shot at another hind crossing the skyline some four hundred yards away—and then, after this staccato fusillade, there is an awful silence.

"Nothing touched, Hugh?"

"Nothing, sir."

"How did I come to miss that stag?"

"You fired just a foot in front of his shoulder, sir," Hugh says hopelessly.

"When he wasn't moving, then? Why, if I had taken my own time I could have had a standing shot!"

"Ay, mebbe that, sir; but I thought he was off; as soon as he saw us I made sure he was off."

There is further silence. The whisky-flask is not produced. Hugh keeps gazing at the skyline as if he expected some of those deer to come back. And then, with thoughts too deep for words, we set out on our way home.

The dusk of the afternoon comes down as we toil over those weary miles of moorland that lie between us and the hobbled pony. It is a very moist moorland. Deep hidden under the spongy peat and verdant moss lie the stumps of trees

which may have been growing when the "forests" of Scotland were forests in reality, not bare wastes; and these unseen stumps are slippery with the wet; so that when the foot happens to strike on them a catastrophe is almost inevitable. Even the experienced Hugh has had one bad fall; thereafter he limps for half an hour. His sombre companion goes head over heels again and again, with no worse result, however, than a strained wrist. The rain pours. We come to the bed of a stream, and wade along the shallows as the easiest path. Eventually we reach the Place of the Hobbling of the Ponies, as it is doubtless called in the Gaelic.

And now for those who want to be taught the miseries of deer-stalking, here beginneth the fifteenth lesson. Beauly entirely refuses to be caught, and as she is hobbled by the fore feet only she can show a fine pair of hind heels whenever anyone tries to get near her. Coaxing is no use; language of another kind is lost upon her. Imaginary hay she knows all about; sudden rushes she defeats. Hugh, with the saddle upon his shoulder, and myself, carrying the two heavy rifles, pursue this vagrant creature mile after mile, trying to hem her in between us, and

in vain. It is ludicrous—quite amusing, indeed —but it is not getting home. At length, after about three miles of this merry chase, she allows one of us to get pretty well close to her; there is a grab at her mane—and she stands. She is saddled; the solitary horseman rests one of the rifles transversely on her neck, and the melancholy procession, as the evening closes down, sets out for the lodge in the distant strath.

I am not the first, to use the cruel phrase of Mephistopheles. I have heard before, from several mouths, of that gloomy ride home, of the torturing conscience, of the agonising questions, of the remorseful guesses at what might have been. If the stag had but sprung forward when you expected? If you had paid no heed to Hugh's admonition, but steadily drawn the bead on the standing deer? If you had sprung to your feet, and made sure of the way he was going to run, so as to have the second barrel? What a size he was, too!—and so near!—broadside on! —a baby's shot!—if only you had known he was going to stand still! And what about the talisman? Of course the talisman must have lost its virtue. Those fellows with the rose-red ties used up all the luck. As a matter of fact, one of them

shot three stags in one day, each an honest stalk; another got two stags, right and left, in driving the woods; while a beardless boy of a barrister secured a very passable six-pointer the very first day he went out. Let no man be generous until he has been just. And then the report to the young lady herself? What explanation is to be made?

Night falls; and still there is this monotonous jog-jog along the undulating but ever descending mountain-track.

"How about the fords, Hugh?

"They'll be bad to-night, sir; the river has risen since the morning."

"Couldn't you leave the pony at the shepherd's, and get home by the Bad Step?"

"I would rather take her back, sir."

"Very well, then, you'll have to try the fords yourself: I'm not going over there in the dark, with the river in spate."

"Oh, no, sir; and if the shepherd's at home he'll carry your rifle up the Bad Step, and it will be the easier for you to climb."

More agonising reflections; more miles of slow trudging through this silent world—silent save for the streams murmuring down from the

hills; and at last we manage to make our way through a sheepfold and pull up in front of the shepherd's house. The tall shepherd comes out; Beauly is handed over to the care of Hugh, who forthwith mounts and departs for the ford; my courteous friend not only takes my rifle, but lends me his staff; and together we set out, he leading the way. At first our route takes us through some sombre woods, in which it is almost impossible for me to descry my guide; but when we reach the Bad Step—which is a zigzag path cut on the face of a perpendicular cliff some three or four hundred feet in height and immediately over the river—we emerge into the open again; and there is the faintest glimmer of light in the north that enables us just to make out the slippery track. It is a tedious and breathless climb after so long a day; but at last it is achieved; nor even here does the shepherd's kindness cease, for he insists on carrying the rifle down into the valley; and then good-night is said, with many thanks, and I am left to find my way home alone.

There are still a couple of miles between the Bad Step and the lodge; but it is not the distance, nor is it the neighbourhood of that

roaring river, nor is it the deep pitfalls among the heather, nor is it your soaked clothes and aching limbs that are your chief concern. Perhaps they are of no concern. "I'm sick of all beneath the skies," was the wail of the luckless lover of Helen of Kirkconnell. One blunders along through this black night in a kind of desperate carelessness, guided only by the sound of the adjacent torrent, which gives some hint of the proper direction. Of course you keep well aside from the Rock Pool—if you stumbled in there, there would be a swift end to all regrets and sorrows. You get away down the strath; you make for what you imagine to be the whereabouts of the lodge; and at last you hear a low whistle: that is Hugh, who has crossed both the fords and got home. The next moment, in the pitch darkness, you come into violent collision with some hard but not unyielding object: this is Beauly, patiently standing at the gate. And you know that within there are a number of people, all so sleek, and dry, and warm, and comfortable—they are doubtless reading in front of the big peat-fire, and thinking of nothing but the now forthcoming dinner—and you are aware that the

moment you present yourself at the door, there will be a universal call: "Well, what have you done?"

"I suffer," Carlyle said on one occasion to the present writer, "a great deal of pheesical meesery, and also of mental gloom."

But the poor old man had not plumbed the deepest deeps. He had never gone for a long and wet day's deer-stalking—and missed.

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